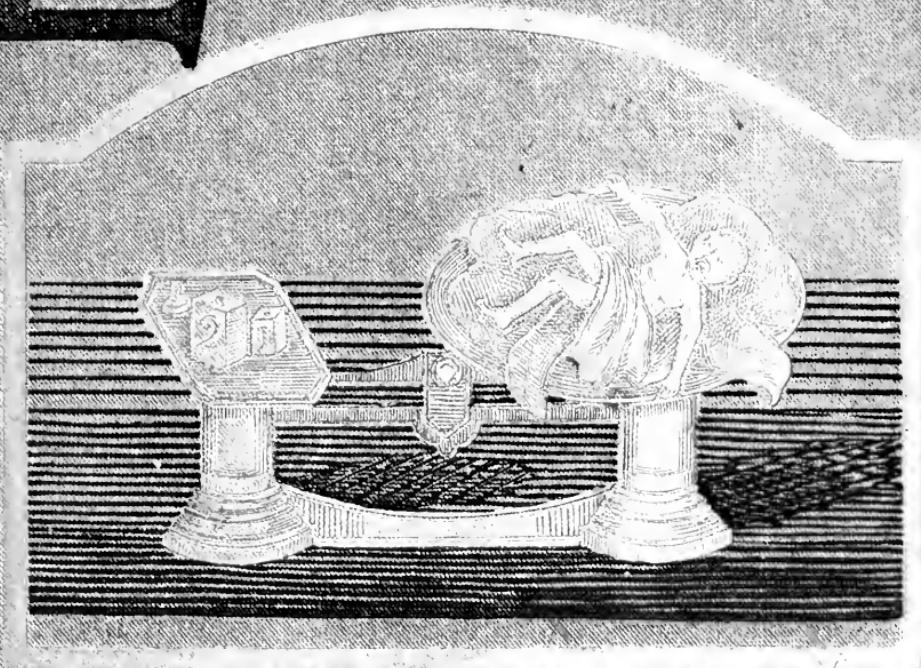


BY THE AUTHOR OF "GINX'S BABY"

LITTLE



HODGE.

CHEAP EDITION.-ILLUSTRATED.



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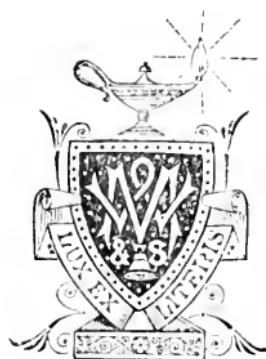
LITTLE HODGE

BY

EDWARD JENKINS M.P.

ILLUSTRATED

THIRTEENTH THOUSAND.



WILLIAM MULLAN & SON

4 PATERNOSTER SQUARE LONDON

4 DONEGAL PLACE BELFAST

1878.

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PART I.

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INTO AND OUT OF THE UNION.

LITTLE HODGE.



CHAPTER I.

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH.

“THREE pounds five ounces and a-half,” said the Union cook, ringing down the half-ounce on the balance to equalise the scales.

In the tin scale on the other side lay on a white cloth -the minutest piece of living humanity that perhaps ever came into the world.

“Well!” said the doctor, “it’s the smallest child I ever knew born alive. It’s hardly worth the trouble the poor woman has had with it.”

“Hum!” said Mr. Mee, the Master of the Union ; “these people thinks nothin’ of the trouble and expense they are to the Parish when they breeds. It’s a curis law that provides for keepin’ sich chits as that alive now, aint it?”

“Poor little creetur!” said the nurse, taking up the morsel of humanity from its uncomfortable

position in the workhouse scales, which had been brought up from the kitchen expressly to test its specific gravity. "It aint got enough body to keep the life in it, I'm afeard. Its lungs can't be larger than straars, can they, doctor?"

"This child," replied that official, not noticing the defect in Mrs. Gussett's comparative anatomy, and pointing to the wee red carcase, which the nurse was proceeding to envelope in some clothes enormously too big for it; "this child is strumous. Moreover, it already exhibits a tendency to hydrocephalus. Its head is as large and weighs nearly as much as the rest of its body. I never saw a human form alive with such legs and arms—they are scarcely fit for a good-sized cockchafer. In Sparta, now, they would have drowned this little animal immediately; or among some Indian tribes of North America, Mrs. Gussett, it would have been your duty, when you saw so conspicuous a failure of nature, to place your finger and thumb tightly on its windpipe, and save the tribe any further anxiety in regard to it."

A groan from the bed here interrupted the conversation—a bed in the lying-in ward of the Coddleton Union, in Russetshire, where this conversation had taken place. The woman from whom the groan proceeded was Mrs. Hodge, wife of John Hodge,

of Hankerley, in the limits of the Union—a woman who had come here for the eighth and last time to be delivered of a child at the cost of the Parish, and had just produced to the world the unprecedented and abortive curiosity which had been the subject of scientific remark. I say there was a groan from the bed at the close of the doctor's historic and social reminiscences, and Mrs. Gussett, saying, "Ah, poor creetur! I'm afeard she aint worth much, doctor," approached the bed.

As she drew near with the little morsel in her hand—it is impossible to speak of so tiny a parcel as occupying her arms—and leaning kindly over the woman asked her if there was anything she wanted, the latter with sudden energy snatched the small bundle from the nurse's grasp, and drawing it to her bosom with all her remaining strength, burst into a passion of tears. Talk of drowning and choking it? The flood rolled down from her white, thin cheeks—O so pale and so poverty-stricken!—baptising the little youngling, and adding to the bubbling springs of its first sorrows rivers from the deep exhaustless ocean of a mother's love. Only a minute or so it lasted, in which the puzzled nurse tried to cheer her and get the child away. Closer and closer she drew it, until all at once the tears ceased, the heaving breath stayed,

the arms loosened their convulsive hold. The Union had done all it could for Mrs. Hodge living—it now only remained to it to bury what was left of her.

At an exclamation of the nurse the doctor had come forward and taken the dead hand in his own, to drop it again immediately.

“I expected this,” said he, coolly. “The woman had scarcely a drop of blood in her. Her circulation was a mere dribble. Carrots and turnips and cabbages, Mr. Mee, I expect every day of her life ; hardly ever a bit of nourishing diet. I wonder these people have any children at all.”

“Yet they do,” said Mr. Mee, “and they come here to have ‘em. We’re most unfortinit in this Union. The child will have to be brought up by hand, and the father’s sure to come upon us for it.”

“The mother then never could ha’ reared it,” said Mrs. Gussett, as holding the child in one hand she drew the covering off the bosom of the dead woman with the other, showing the pale, skinny breast, shrunken and depressed with the want and care, the famine and pain, of five-and-thirty years. “She’d a never ‘ad anythin’ for it anyways. It’s as well she’s gone, poor thing !” And the woman, with a touch of reverence, covered up the shrunken

body and turned away with the child from the coffin of its hopes.

“I’ll just book the case,” said the doctor, making a memorandum. “No inquest will be necessary, Mr. Mee. ‘Inanition after child-birth.’ You had better try the little thing, Mrs. Gussett, with that young girl who came in yesterday from the Hall. She’s healthy enough. Ah ! sad work for a Christmas-eve, eh ? Merry Christmas to you both ! Good night.”

CHAPTER II.

WASTED GRIEF.

THE next morning John Hodge, having with the assistance of his eldest girl aged thirteen, dressed his children, and concocted a queer mess whereof bread, cabbage and an inch of bacon, with a great quantity of water, were the constituents, called at the Union to inquire how it fared with his wife.

The porter at the door looked at him not unkindly, knowing that the shell for his wife's body had only preceded him upstairs a few minutes.

“Merry Christmas!” said John Hodge.

“Ah! there's bad news for you, John,” said the porter. “You may go into the Master's room. He's there, I b'leeve.”

“Ah! she've a 'ad the beaby then?”

The other nodded.

“Born dead, I s'poase?” continued John, the reality not occurring to him as possible. “Ah! well, they be hard to bring up these times. She've

a'ad a goodish deal o' trubble and hard work, poor creetur! But she *will* taake on so about un, I knew."

"Hem!" said the porter. "The baby's all right so far as I hear, John, though they do say it's the littlest ever was born."

"The beaby aal right an' bad news vor I?" said John, his mind slowly harking back to the man's first words, his eyebrows rising in pain, and his whole face transformed as with a sudden revelation of the truth. "Es anythin' tha matter wi' Meary then?"

The porter nodded again.

"Oh! she'll get oaver 'un," said John, confidently, compressing his lips as was his wont to show decision. "She've a ben vury ill avore, but she allus cum roun', she did. She's stronger nor she looks, is Meary."

"She'll never come round again, John," said the other, softly but firmly.

"What!" said John, the drops instantly spouting from his eyes in a perfect shower. "Ee doant zay my Meary's dead, Tummas? Ee doant mean *that*, Tummas! My Meary dead? Dead, Tummas? Ee doant zay zo, do ee?"

The man was bereft. His most expensive luxury was gone. The base accomplice who had conspired with him against all social law and well-being to

produce eleven other expensive sorrows was taken away. The partner of a hard purgatorial life had left him alone with the brood of their joint stupidity and criminal recklessness. The mouth that swallowed up a part of his petty earnings—though God Omniscent knows 'twas ever the least and worst remnant of all!—was now closed and would no more exact its toll from his scanty life-gage. Yet there was this miserable man, of a Christmas morning, careering round the hall of Coddleton Union in a state of incoherent grief because 'Meary was dead!'

When John Hodge had wept awhile over the appropriate shell that contained the poor remains of his dead wife, he was conducted to a room where his tiny offspring was taking in life from a girl who had 'met with a misfortune' at the Squire's. His exclamation, when, wiping away from his red eyes the film of grief, he caught sight of the diminutive creature, resembled that of its late nurse.

"La bless me, beant ee a little un! Why ee aint big enuf ta live, be un?"

The grotesquerie of the thing for a while stayed the current of Hodge's sorrow. He was the father of the smallest child in the world.

CHAPTER III.

A COMPETENCY.

LITTLE HODGE remained a week in charge of the unlucky damsel from the Hall. He was of a size to want but little, and seemed by nature quiet enough. The cries of such a one could not at all events reach very far. Had the Public and the Parish been content to leave him where Providence seemed to have placed him, the *beau-ideal* of conservative policy would have been attained, and he might have developed into an under-sized but ordinary man, with a history unworthy of note. But the Press got hold of him. When the Press gets hold of a child or a man, quietness for that child or that man is imperilled for ever. Who then can say whether that child or that man shall ever repose again in the bosom of the unforgotten and unknown? A paragraph appeared in the weekly sheet issued at the county town, announcing that the smallest child in the world had been born in Coddleton Union. This paragraph naturally slipped into sly

corners in the provincial and metropolitan newspapers. Along with the advertisements of Holloway's pills it reached America, Australia and the Sandwich Islands. Here was fame achieved without any effort on the part of its object. Many visitors came to the workhouse—physicians, surgeons, comparative anatomists, and one or two social science philosophers. They all arrived at the conclusion that he was very small, and were agreed in the conviction that he could not live. A gentleman notoriously connected with national shows determined, on this contingency, to utilise him for the public benefit. He made advances to the Master of the House for the transmission of the anticipated remains, carefully corked in a bottle of spirits, to the West Parkton Museum. Happy had been the fate of our Little Hodge had he been thus preserved and labelled for the instruction of the masses! Whether he would have done as much good as his life gave rise to, is a question yet to be settled. Meantime his local popularity was amazing. The Squire and his lady and their children, and others of the neighbouring aristocracy, went to see him, and predicted for him a career as successful as that of Tom Thumb.

Is it not curious what interest may be aroused by a physical deformity, compared with the anxiety

created by the most hideous moral or social monstrosities? Neither scientific man, nor county squire, nor parson, nor magistrate, recognised in this child the presentment of the deterioration of a class which lent no small share to the production of the necessities of life. How often we prefer looking at the glass instead of through it, examining curiously the concrete fact and disregarding the abstract principles that lie behind it! As to these things a dead truth for us is the poet's apophthegm:—

“ We look before and after,
And pine for what is not,”

for we regard not relations and strain too little after the better and more perfect. Were we to use our microscopes to look *at* many facts which our eyes glance over to pass away, ignorant of their before and after relations, of their real substance, how could we in conscience permit those facts to lie as unregarded as we do?

But another, to Little Hodge, more immediately important power whose attention was given to him, was the Parish, and in its hands his fate by the law of England and the will of Providence hung poised. John Hodge, his father, was a labourer employed

by a neighbouring land-tenant, who to give respectability to his rough tweed clothes and rougher manners was called a gentleman-farmer, at the current wages in that neighbourhood of nine shillings a-week. He had a cottage rent-free—a tenement I may hereafter describe. In front of the cottage was a strip of soil thirty feet long by sixteen broad, where, under the late Mrs. Hodge's management, rows of green peas and scarlet-runners were wont of an early spring to flaunt their gay flowers, while towards autumn the browning leaves and haulms of potatoes or the martialled cabbages gave token of a thrifty outlook to the hungry winter. You may ascertain how much this estate with assiduous care and scientific culture would add to a family's resources, by an experiment in the background of your dwelling in Brompton or Camden Town.

This, however, does not sum up all Hodge's benefits. For the harvest weeks Mr. Jolly, the gentleman-farmer aforesaid, gave each of his men a bonus of thirty shillings, thus increasing their annual stipend in cash to the sum of £24 18s. Through the same period and in thrashing-time they were supplied with a quart a-day of mild ale, home-brewed, which the honest farmer, to prove how good it was, would himself take a pull at in

the field ; a test *he* could stand, though to the ill-fed stomachs of the men it did not always prove a sedative. The Hodge family also took their share in the annual gleanings, which added something to their stock of food. At Christmas each family on the estate received a piece of beef, a sack of potatoes, and half-a-ton of coal from the Hall, and a pair of blankets from a parish charity. The second boy of the family earned two shillings a-week for seven or eight weeks in the year, in the corn-fields or elsewhere.

We may, therefore, sum up Hodge's total receipts and resources for the food, clothing, and housing of his family, consisting of two adults and ten children, Little Hodge, for the time, being out of the question, as follows :—

IN MONEY.

	<i>£ s. d.</i>
His Wages—52 weeks at 9 <i>s.</i> a-week	23 8 0
Harvest Money extra	1 10 0
Jack Hodge—8 weeks at 2 <i>s.</i> a-week	0 16 0
<hr/>	
Cash receipts per annum . .	<i>£ 25 14 0</i>
<hr/>	

IN KIND.

	£	s.	d.
Gleanings	3	0	0
60 Quarts of Mild Ale at 3d. (?) . . .	0	15	0
10 lbs. of Beef at 11d.	0	9	2
1 Sack of Potatoes	0	6	0
Half-ton of Coals at 21s.	0	10	6
1 Pair of Blankets	0	12	0
 Total value in kind	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	£5	12	8

If we place upon the house and its small allotment the extravagant rent of eighty shillings, it appears that at the highest estimate Hodge's whole receipts reached thirty-five pounds a-year; out of which he had to keep himself in working condition, to clothe, feed, educate, if might be, a family. Both he and his wife had always abhorred the workhouse, but it will scarcely be held to their discredit that they had latterly found it necessary, on such critical emergencies as the one with which our story opens, to apply to the Parish for its aid. Every ratepayer in the place was thus practically obliged to contribute something toward Hodge's wages, and a great deal more toward the wages of many of Hodge's mates, whose sensibilities were not so keen or their thrift so notable as those of Hodge and his

wife. No one will have any difficulty in understanding why Mr. Jolly was an ardent opponent of a rise of wages, and was wont in argument to point significantly to the full Union. Was it not cheaper to pay rates assisted by the Parish, than to pay a rate of wages to keep his labourers off the Parish?

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOCKERY OF HOPE.

I SAID the Parish had now got hold of the little problem, Little Hodge. ‘What will he do with it?’ was a question it might have puzzled any Tory novelist to answer, and may puzzle many such novelists for many a year to come. When John Hodge with a common, dingy bit of crape around his hat, a child in either hand—the eldest two, who were best able to appreciate the solemnity of the time—turned away from the brown mound of fresh earth, which he had to the last moment watched the sexton trimming and moulding with his spade into some smoothness of outline, his first thought was—

“What’s to be done wi’ tha little un?”

The mother he had heard the curate consign to earth, in ‘sure and certain hope’ of a joyful resurrection. What hope was there for the living she had left behind her? Hodge’s heart sank within him when he faced that question in his slow, congealed mind. God, and the Parson, and the Parish,

and the Master of the Union, and Mr. Jolly, and his own position, all seemed to mock him solemnly with the antithesis to professed hope of express facts. Hodge had a grim forecast that he would be made legally responsible for the bringing up of the 'little un,' and that he dare not rely on the Parish to keep it a day longer than it could help. He never entertained a suspicion that he had been unduly burdening himself with a progeny. He regarded children as an institution of nature or Providence, and as much a matter of course or no course as a fall of rain or a crop of wheat. No law to abstain from procreation being written on his heart any more than it is on the instinct of any other animal, one cannot bring him within the circle of St. Paul's responsibles—'their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.' On that point how could he have any doubts? We cannot wonder that he should deem Providence or the Parish or his master or somebody bound to enable him to support his family. At this particular moment, when the mainstay of the family was gone, this postulate occurred to him with peculiar force. We shall hereafter trace the results of his cogitations; meanwhile let us follow the action of the Parish with regard to his youngest child.

CHAPTER V.

PAROCHUS IN COUNCIL.

MR. BOND, the Clerk of the Union, Mr. Mee, the Master, and Mr. Coleman, the relieving officer, were preparing for the Board meeting. There was the question of the meat contract ; there was the question of coals ; there was the question of Anna Maria Simmons, aged eighteen, late servant at the Hall, ejected with disgrace, upon a certain discovery, and forced to run for refuge to the Union, while the cause of her disaster remained for the present an unblcmished groom to ride about with the Squire's daughters ; and lastly there was the question of Little Hodge.

On the other matters Mr. Mee had formed and formulated an opinion, but he admitted to himself that on this one he was in doubt. He knew Hodge's position perfectly well. A man with ten children at home, the eldest only thirteen, his wife dead, the absolute claims of life peremptorily demanding that he should spend ten or eleven hours a-day out of

his house, it was clear enough that to send him home the new-born babe to look after, was to raise a problem for Hodge doubtfully soluble. On the other hand, Mr. Mee was equally clear that the law, by which he was regulated, threw upon Hodge and not upon the Parish the responsibility of solving that problem. Yet in the hope that something would occur to himself or to the Guardians which might justify the retention of the little curiosity in the workhouse, Mr. Mee had not discharged his duty, and returned the child to the father the day after Mrs. Hodge was buried. Mr. Mee was an official ; he was bound to look at every question from an official point of view, he was of necessity precluded from involving natural sympathies with official duties, but there was a seldom-reached humanity at the bottom of his heart which Hodge's long anxious face and Little Hodge's peeping cries stirred up a little. He ascertained from the girl that the dwarfish strangeling, so limited were his requirements, really made no difference to her or her own baby, and accordingly felt justified in straining a point to keep him in the Union.

The composition of the Board of Guardians is perhaps nothing to us here. It has to do with those picturesque, remote, widely-scattered country interests whereof we easily lose sight from their

very want of aggregation and obtrusiveness. Yet, in rural districts, great is the power of this body and important the jurisdiction it administers for thousands upon thousands of our fellow-countrymen. The Coddleton Union consisted of sixteen parishes, whereof some of the incumbents, being Justices of the Peace, were *ex-officio* members. There were also county squires and gentlemen and a fair proportion of farmers, who, though not the most regular attendants, could always be whipped up to any meeting of interest. On the day when Master Hodge's fate was to be decided, the Rev. Winwood Leicester, M.A., Vicar of Hankerley ; Captain Collingsby ; Sydney Byrton, Esq., of Byrton Hall, Chairman ; Mr. Caldwell, a solicitor ; Mr. Harris, a 'merchant,' and several others were present.

The meat contract was considered, and a trial of Australian meat ordered in the old women's ward. The coal contract was given out to a nephew of Mr. Harris. Spite of the protest of the Squire, it was ordered that the groom at Byrton Hall should be summoned to contribute to the support of Anna Maria's child, the Squire declaring 'it was more her fault than his.' Then came up the Hodge matter. Mrs. Hodge had been buried ; it was no use disputing that item. Mee said it was impos-

sible to recover the burial expenses from John Hodge, and after some demur the impossibility was admitted.

“Did the child die too?” said Mr. Leicester, whose curate had buried the mother.

“No, sir,” replied the Master, cautiously.

“What has he done with it, then?”

“Well, sir, the fact is—hem—we did not like to take upon us in the circumstances to order its removal. The young woman, Simmons, is feedin’ it, and she says it’s no trouble to her; and as it’s no expense to the Union, I thought I had better keep it till the Board decided what to do with it.”

“Quite illegal, Mr. Mee,” said the solicitor; “totally *contra legem*.”

“But you see, Mr. Caldwell,” said the Vicar, “it does not cost anything, and it seems reasonable in the circumstances. I suppose that man Hodge has no one at home to look after it?”

“Not a soul!” replied Mr. Mee.

“No mother-in-law or deceased wife’s sister?” asked the attorney.

“No,” replied the Master; “no relations hereabouts. I can’t think how the law would ever let such as them get a settlement.”

“Bad management, sir — bad management.

Between the new poor laws and the neglect of the guardians and overacted philanthropy our interests have been shamefully neglected, sir."

"However," said Mee, gaining ground, "here are the facts, gentlemen. Hodge has ten children at home, and the oldest is thirteen. His wages is nine shillings a-week, and he must work six days a-week to earn them. Who's to look after this baby now his wife is dead?"

This simple statement of the situation seemed to startle the Board as much as the similar oracular but matter-of-fact utterances of a noble statesman ecstasise the press and the public.

"Well," said the attorney, "we have nothing to do with that. The man must look after his own infant. You may depend upon it, if we keep the child here we shall have the Focal Government Board down upon us directly. It is all very well to say the child doesn't cost us anything because that servant of yours feeds it, Mr. Chairman."

"I beg pardon, sir," interrupted that gentleman, haughtily, "be good enough to confine yourself to facts. She is *not* my servant, sir!"

"Well, she was," said the other, "till she came on the parish. I did not in the least intend any courtesy, sir. I was going to remark that no doubt Anna Maria What's-her-name will consume

more beef-tea and beer in consequence of this extra draught upon her—if you will pardon the *double-entendre*, gentlemen—and you may depend upon it this will not escape the eye of Mr. Mordant."

Mr. Mordant was the President of the Focal Government Board. The Guardians laughed at the idea of regarding Miss Simmons as a conduit-pipe from the ratepayers to Little Hodge of an appreciable bounty, and, being in a good humour, resolved that for the present he should not be disturbed. Hodge's mind was therefore for a while relieved from the pain of solving an impracticable problem.

CHAPTER VI.

FOCAL GOVERNMENT !

To almost supreme control of local administrations in England, one department of Government has by a series of successful stratagems at length won its way. In not very ancient times the people jealously guarded the rights of self-administration. Any encroachment by the central power would have been resented, and was resented by that innumerable, powerful conclave whom I may combine under the name of Parochus. Mighty, too mighty in those days was the spirit of Parochus, and very mean withal, sometimes ! Vestries, guardians of the poor, commissioners of various sorts, highway boards, and the county magistrates, were the autocrats of their particular districts ; and an inspector to inquire into their administration, overhaul their books, ask impertinent questions, and report upon their shortcomings, would have been an unendurable phenomenon, that might have

been sent back again to the minister who sent him with a flea in his ear. Parochus was confessedly a bad administrator. He, of all people in the world, could with best propriety confess in the parish church his sins done and duties left undone. Too frequently was he slow, blind, careless, corrupt and costly in his ways of doing and undoing. But there was a paramount good in him which no free people could afford to overlook or safely forego—he developed and maintained local action and local independence. When he had to administer monstrously bad laws for the relief of the poor, he unfortunately was too human not to take advantage of them if they could be twisted in his own behoof, or he was benevolent and reckless with funds not entirely his own. He regarded the Poor-law as a valuable auxiliary to agriculture, and so administered it. What little he had to do in a sanitary way he did badly, being on the average as ignorant of the natural laws of Health as his neighbours and most of the law-makers. Now the remedy devised by modern legislators for these defects in the character of parochial management was not so much to educate Parochus and his constituency and make them capable and desirous of better things, as to tie Parochus hand and foot to a supreme central power which should force him to

do its behests. This remedy has been applied and is being applied with a heroic decisiveness that bids fair to leave poor Parochus nothing but a puppet, dancing to strings pulled by a minister sufficiently histrionic for the purpose, who is ensconced in a dilapidated old tabernacle of Public Charity in Whitehall. Important indeed are his powers and sometimes absolutely necessary, but only sometimes ; the less used the better. If, however, this absorption of power goes on we may yet arrive at a time in England when a man will not be free to blow his nose without a Government order, for fear of propagating the influenza, or under penalties to send the result to a Government analyst. Any one thinking about it will see how much easier this plausible and rough-and-ready means of solution is than a powerful and determined stroke of statesmanship, by which the laws should be made more systematic and perfect, local authorities reorganised without revolution, and local action made at once more intelligent and more vigorous.

However, a great people and its leading press had combined to give themselves up into the hands of the histrionic minister aforesaid, whoever in the exigencies of party he might happen to be, and the histrionic minister of the day sat in the Focal centre, with the proud consciousness that every

Poor-law board, and every local administrative body and all their officers were under his thumb, and naked and open to his Inspectorial Argus. The latest case of diarrhoea, the coughing of some ancient cow, the dismissal of a poor-house nurse, might form the subjects of elaborate reports to the mighty Super-parochial Archon at Whitehall. Truth forbids I should question the unquestionable good sometimes done by this surveillance, or the too patent necessity for some intervention; but it is surely not a conclusive reason for reversing the policy of centuries and resorting to CENTRALISATION, that bad laws were badly administered by badly-constituted local authorities. It would seem to an ordinary mind more rational to try first the effect of better laws administered by better-constituted authorities, under a supervising instead of a dictatorial power.

Little Hodge was destined to come under the surveillance of Super-Parochus. Not that the Union nursling made any noise. Few were his piping plaints and small enough his needs. But one day as the great Minister sat at his desk, discussing with a permanent secretary and a clerk some memoranda made by the latter upon reports received from all parts of the country, he came across the following minute:—

*“Report from Coddleton Union: generally satisfy.
Numbers relieved through the Q^r*

<i>Indoor (both sexes)</i>	.	567
<i>Outdoor</i>	.	1643
<i>Deaths in Union</i>	.	8
<i>Births</i>	,	5

“The Master reports one of the latter, male child of a woman named Hodge, who died after birth, as smaller than any child ever known in those parts, weighing only a little over 3 lbs. at birth. Child of John Hodge, a labourer, with ten other small children. Its size being so inconsiderable, and the father being totally unable to provide any one to take care of it, the infant has been retained in the Union, but at no expense, being suckled by Anna Maria Simmons above reported.”

The great Minister perused this minute and knit his brows.

“This is one more evidence,” said he, “of the wisdom of our recent measure. You see how this Board of Guardians in the most illegal manner keep this child on at the expense of the rate-payers, when it has a parent whose duty it is to provide for it. We really cannot overlook this.”

“But,” said Mr. Dockster, the clerk, “it must be

admitted, sir, the case is, as I may say, *sui generis*. The facts seem to show that the father could not take care of it, and it does not appear to cost the Union anything, as it is nourished by the girl Simmons."

"As regards your first point," said the Minister, "the answer is conclusive. To an able-bodied man in England nothing is impossible. And as to the second point, who nourishes the girl Simmons, Mr. Dockster? Is she not fed at the expense of the Union, and are we to believe that she can feed two children on the same diet and stimulant as would suffice for one? Sir, it is contrary to reason and to the laws of physics."

"Exactly what I should have said," remarked the permanent secretary.

"Yes," said Mr. Dockster, "this would be perfectly true in most cases; but," he added, with a ghastly effort to smile, "this child is peculiarly diminutive, and I may say, under correction, *de minimis non curat lex.*"

"Mr. Dockster," said the Minister, severely, "I am astonished that after so many years' service in this department, and possessed as you are of an intimate acquaintance with our recent policy, you should quote to *Me* that hackneyed and long-exploded aphorism! I'd have you know, sir, that

in the present dispensation of this department there is nothing too small to be beneath our notice, and it has, as you well know, been my humble endeavour to organise an inspectorial system so perfect as to bring every molecule in the British Islands within the scope—I might say the microscope—of the Focal Government Board."

Mr. Dockster was crushed by this tremendous rebuke. The permanent secretary took up the dialogue.

"This matter must be fully investigated. Make a note, Mr. Dockster, to write a letter to the clerk of the Guardians requesting an explanation."

And the august trio passed to other business.

Thus Mr. Caldwell's legal instinct proved true, and the supreme administrators of the law *did* take note of Little Hodge's oblique and petty drain on the national resources.

Ah, Mr. Dockster, Mr. Super-Parochus, Mr. Permanent-Secretary! but there *is* an aspect in which that aphorism is a historical text! How long of such minimis, and the like of such minimis, has the law been too uncareful? Of the very poor, very weak, very humble and little ones scattered over this broad, rich country, how small hath been the anxiety of the laws, or of society, the instigator of the laws? If now the minimis cry out and

make themselves heard, and swell portentously into great bodies, requiring instant attention, what if the neglect of the past shall have left them such that caring for them is less easy, or even involves some great and permanent revolution? Yet will it not be a blessed revolution alone that we shall turn and care for these very little ones?

CHAPTER VII.

LOCAL VERSUS FOCAL.

AT the first meeting of the Guardians which took place after the conversation last reported, Little Hodge was an item among the agenda. The clerk read a letter in these terms:—

“FOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD,
“WHITEHALL, June 30th, 18—.

“SIR,—*I am to state, for the information of the Guardians, that the attention of the President has been called to a minute in the last quarterly report from Coddleton Union, respecting the case of an infant,—Hodge, child of John Hodge, of Hankerley, stated to be still maintained within the workhouse, although it appears that the father is neither an inmate, nor imbecile, nor dead, nor in receipt of out-door relief.*

“*I am directed by the President to point out that this is an irregularity of a grave character, which demands explanation, or may give rise to a*

searching inquiry, necessitating the visit of a Special Commissioner to examine into the circumstances. In the meanwhile I am to ask you to request the Board to forward to this department a statement of the facts and of the grounds, if any, of their departure from the proper legal course.

“I have the honour, &c.,

“JEREMY DOCKSTER.

“To PETER PLIMSOLL BOND, Esq.,
&c., &c., &c.”

The Guardians looked at each other when this letter was read. Mr. Caldwell's face wore a satisfied look as of a man who had predicted the worst and happily hit upon it. The Squire first broke silence. Pink, and rosy, and passionate was the look of his cheeks through his grey whiskers over his high collar.

“Demme,” said he, “this Focal Government Board is getting to be altogether too cocky and crotchety. What the d——(I beg your pardon, my good friend, but really Scriptural language won't meet the exigency of the case) has the President of the Board to do with our spending our own money on this trumpery chit if we like to do it? It's not a matter of forty shillings, and he threatens us with

a commission ! Why, demme, gentlemen, if this goes on you won't get any gentleman of respectability to take a seat at any board in the country. Are the heads of some of the best and oldest families in the country to be bullied and hectored by any upstart jack-in-office who has tickled the ears of the democracy with his tongue, and got the reward of it from a Radical Government ? Really, sir——”

The Squire's choler grew so hot and foamed so high he could not express himself, and he thumped his hand on the table with the vigour of a prize-fighter. He was anything but a trampled worm.

“ I must say,” said Mr. Leicester, mildly, “ that I think this is reducing local government to an absurdity. We sit here as a number of intelligent persons ”—the parson's eye looked doubtfully round upon some of his audience—“ simply to register the decrees of Mr. Mordant. Were I not necessarily a member I should certainly withdraw from a body so completely overfaced.”

The Squire looked approvingly at the parson.

“ But what about the child ? ” said the attorney. “ Is it worth while fighting the President about so small a thing, eh ? Our only plea is its size, I think Mr. Clerk ? ”

"I know of nothing else," said Mr. Bond, the Clerk, "that we can put forward as an excuse. We're certainly maintaining the child."

"It's much ado about nothin', to my mind," said Mr. Harris. "The child aint nothin', he don't cost nothin', and he's not to 'ave nothin'. That's about it, eh, Mr. Caldwell?"

"Ha, ha, ha ! very good," said the attorney, who had reasons for keeping on good terms with Harris, but who, seeing that the Vicar and the Squire did not move a muscle, suddenly made a violent effort and drew his face into a shocking state of gravity. "But nevertheless, Mr. Harris, a joke somewhat ill-timed, eh? For it really is a serious question, What are we to do?"

"Fight it to the death, I say," cried Captain Collingsby, who in his time had done something of that sort in more than words, and would no doubt have trained a sixty-four pounder on the offices of Focal Government without any compunction. "It's not a question of size. If this child was as big as Og, or Gog either, and required a puncheon a-day, 'twould be all the same. I stand upon the principle of the thing. If a lubber at head-quarters is to poke his nose into every little transaction of this sort, when this Board is perfectly capable of forming an opinion, let him come and sit here and

administer the Poor-law himself. I'm hanged if I'll sit here to register his orders."

"Hum, Cap'n," said Mr. Harris, tradesman in wholesale and retail matters all round the district, whose election to the Board was no little humiliation to some of its members, for the Coddleton district was an old-fashioned and secluded one, and Harris was a fellow unpleasantly commercial and radical, "I think, Cap'n, they might administer it better than it has been done: more to the advantage of the ratepayers and less of the gentlemen. Perhaps if you dissenshuns was to retire we might get in some men who knew somethin' about business——"

"And how to feather their nest," added the Captain.

"There can be no doubt," said the Squire, looking straight away from the merchant, "that the gentleman has an intimate acquaintance with business of a certain kind, such as coals, or tallow-chandlery, and manures, and possibly others of similar qualifications could be found to undertake the duties of the Board, especially if their nephews were in trade also; but I take leave to say that there are several sorts of 'business,' and several ways of doing 'business,' and if the country is to have the Poor-law administered as it ought to be,

it must be administered by men of means and position."

"All right," said Mr. Harris, good-naturedly ; "but of course, if the gentlemen *retires*, the tradesmen 'll take it up."

"But," insisted Mr. Caldwell, "now we have cleared the air, let me ask again, What is to be done with—a—blank Hodge— Why the deuce hasn't it been baptised, Mr. Bond?"

"Not baptised ?" cried Mr. Leicester. " Impossible ! Someone must have done it !"

The consternation was general. Mr. Mee was referred to, and it indeed turned out that the troublesome little heathen had not been received within the pale of the Church. To the disgust of both the attorney and the merchant, Mr. Leicester refused to go on with any more business until this untoward defect was remedied. He could not conscientiously proceed with a discussion vitally affecting this child's interests, if it were as yet an unreclaimed, unchristened child of nature. Dying in that state it could not be buried in consecrated ground. The Vicar's earnestness and sincerity carried the day. It was informally resolved to have the child in and christen him forthwith.

Anna Maria brought him into the Board-room

and held him forth while the Vicar, after reading part of the service, dipped his hands in a parish basin.

“What shall I call him?” asked the Vicar, suddenly alive to the necessity of a name.

“Well,” said the unconscionable attorney, “you might use a Scriptural authority. ‘There is little Benjamin.’”

“Little Benjamin,” said the Vicar, with his eyes shut, “I baptise thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN!”

Thus Little Hodge became a Christian.

Resuming the discussion after this episode, the farmers on the main question joined with the Captain and the Squire. This they saw to be a critical case. The Minister was evidently determined to arrogate every jot of authority, and to make the Guardians what Britons never will be. By reducing their discretion to nothing, he would diminish their control of the labour market. It was therefore resolved, spite of the protests of *ex officio* and other members, that a reply to Mr. Dockster’s letter should be sent to the Focal Government Board, deprecating its interference in a matter solely within the province of the Guardians, stating as strong a case as possible for Hodge and

the infant, and announcing the resolution of the Guardians to continue the parochial supervision of Anna Maria's bounty to Little Hodge.

Only an Englishman could understand the proceedings that thereupon followed. A special Government inspector—the ordinary inspector was not considered equal to this great emergency—arrived at Coddleton and took up his quarters at the 'Coddleton Arms.' He visited the Union, examined the master, examined Anna Maria Simmons, examined Little Hodge; ascertained the exact amount of pabulum and stimulant taken by the young woman, and compared it with that given to others of her size and weight. The result was an elaborate report to the central authority, in which, after a careful chemical analysis, Dr. Surchas came to the conclusion that four ounces a-day of food and half-a-pint of stout was the amount of extra consumption for which Little Hodge was distinctly responsible; that the ratepayers were consequently to that extent defrauded; and he advised that immediate action should be taken to vindicate the law.

In consequence of this report a peremptory order came down to the Board of Guardians to withdraw at once its illegal relief from the infant Hodge, and to enforce upon the father the duty of its

maintenance, or serious consequences might ensue to all concerned. The Board yielded with bad grace. Englishmen are all like Falstaff. They like not to do even their duty under compulsion, and this is a characteristic well worthy the consideration of both legislators and administrators.

PART II.



OUT OF ONE UNION INTO ANOTHER.



CHAPTER I.

THE RIGOUR OF THE IMPOSSIBLE.

HODGE took in very bad part the notice that his tiny son was to be returned upon his hands, to be by him fed, clothed, tended, and brought up to years of laborious discretion. There is little room for impartial consideration when Necessity sets her hard, iron heel upon a man. I cannot hold him very responsible for what he then thinks and says.

The problem arising out of the situation had troubled him at his wife's grave. Now it could no longer be regarded, with the eye of a philosopher, as looming in the distance. Here it was ; a present practical joke of Nature whereof Hodge was the victim. Yokel-like he put off the question as long as he could ; and thus it happened that the day after he had received the notice, he came home to find Little Hodge chirping in the arms of Jemima Mary, his eldest hope. From six years old to twelve, Mary's small arms had held not a few babies, and the shape of her back had rather

suffered by it; but never had she nursed one so proportionate with her own size as her present fondling. So it seemed to Hodge as he looked at the little woman cradling on her lap the doll-like baby, its brothers and sisters crowding wonderingly around. Their exclamations were very entertaining, had Hodge been in a mood to be entertained.

A film came over the poor man's sight as he looked. Then he held his great finger towards the elfin child, and it vainly strove to curl its small tentacles round that horny stem, as it smiled a quaint smile to its troubled parent. It was a pretty enough scene this, or would have looked so on paper, or in fact anywhere except in real life. This man felt it to be unutterably painful, as he thought on all the prospects that it suggested. Little Jemima Mary was clearly incapacitated to be a permanent nurse to the baby. It was fun to her to hold the then well-fed doll an hour or two in her arms, but how could she nurse, feed, physic and tend it? And how could he afford to pay anyone else to do it—or give up his livelihood to do it himself? He took up the nursling in his hand as he mused on this difficulty. The 'little un' crowed and peeped like a chicken just unegged, and the strong man's hand trembled a moment as he

thought how easily a turn of that wrist would relieve him of the problem. But it grew firm again directly, for there was a deep, gentle nature in this simple rustic.

“Meary,” said he, uttering once more the formula ever in his mind, “beant ee a little un?”

“Ay, fayther, beant un?”

“’Ow shall us keep un, Meary? Who’s to be a mother to un?”

“I’ll be ‘is mother,” said Mary, assuming as matronly an air as her size would admit of. “I ken taäke keer on un nicely, fayther, zo as you’ll dress the childern. An’ theer’s Tummas, ee’s ‘andy too, ee’ll ‘elp us to do’t, woant ee, Tummas?”

To tell the truth, Tummas—his name was *not* Thomas, and never was meant to be—preferred bird-nesting and stile-riding to giving any aid in domestic work, but under the pressure of his father’s presence he graciously assented to this proposal.

“Naaw, *’twount* do!” exclaimed Hodge, energetically stamping his foot. “Thee ken’t mannige un, Meary! Who’s to bile tha taters, an’ maake tha broth, an’ dress out aal thay youngsters, an’ gi’e thease little bagger ’is food an’ look arter un? . . . Law! but ee be a small mowld of ‘is mother! Poor ooman! Ah! I wish *she* wer yere, Meary! . .

Yere taake tha baaby, Meary," said he, softly putting back the dwarfling into Mary's lap as she sat on the stool, and walking gently out of the house. Mary discerned him but dimly through the diamond-shaped panes, but she could see that with head bent he slowly went toward the churchyard ; and her tears falling on the child's face made it cry. In a minute the other nine were in full chorus.

CHAPTER II.

NOTICE BEFORE ACTION.

JOHN HODGE, as the Guardians had failed him, thought it right to resort to his master. He must either have the child taken care of for him, or get the means to pay for taking care of it. We need not be hard upon his logic. It was bad, but natural. We must allow it not to be arguable that an extra child at home is any ground for an increase of wages. Yet for a man to be so scantily paid that, even with honest thrift, such an addition to his expenses should be fatal to his domestic economy was a fact of enough gravity to be worth the wage-payer's notice. Anyone skimming starvation at such a hair's-breadth cannot be earning proper wages, and certainly cannot properly do his work. Hodge was not at the moment equal to so fine an argument ; and, though he had resolved to ask for better pay, he hung back when the time came to act on his resolution. Twice or thrice he lay in wait for Mr. Jolly, but no sooner was he face to

face with the farmer, than the serf's heart in Hodge failed him: his desires would not stumble out.

Now, however, every day was squeezing fresh drops of blood from Hodge's heart. He had been obliged to stint the other children to get the poor pint of skim-milk which, badly mingled with flour by the joint cookery of himself and Mary, constituted the manikin's diet, or to pay a woman now and then to come and rescue his house from absolute chaos. He began to see in his family the painful signs of hollowness and want. Little Hodge's body seemed to shrink dismally smaller. Hodge pinched himself and went forth to his labour of a morning with a gnawing within, which, like the prodigal, he—the reverse of prodigal!—strove to appease with the hips and haws his master's swine would not have eaten.

Think, whether you be man or woman or happy little child, what it is or might be to work twelve hours with a half-filled stomach—with a yearning for food unattainable not only this hour, but the next, and the next, and the next, and so on through the weary working day, and no hope that it will be relieved at night! Could you invent us any torture more skilful, any physical pain or trial more refined and unrelenting than this? Yet, how

true it is that many a poor soil-tiller, inwardly gnawed with such cravings as these, pursues with patience his ill-paid toil, or vainly endeavours with some crude woody vegetable to stay his hunger, and returns at eventide to his home but an apology for the man he ought to be.

Little Mary, with a God-given instinct of motherliness, cheated herself of some of her own petty portion, and with her constant care of the sickening, peevish dwarfing, grew day by day so thin and haggard, that her father's stricken heart smote him yet more sorely as he looked at her. God help me! The picture of this empty man sitting of an evening, soil-stained and toil-weary, facing the eleven with all their wants, and brooding over the desperate prospects of yet more trying times, rises before me with such vividness, that I find myself trembling with an anguish and pity I cannot, dare not try to express. I can only wonder at his patience—patience as of a dumb dog; very beautiful, but O how pitiful, how pitiful!

At length flesh and blood could bear it no longer. Desperation gave him boldness. He watched his opportunity, and when Farmer Jolly came into the field where he was cutting the grass, the man, with a sidelong gait, drew near the burly tenant.

"If yo please, zur, mid I zaay a word to yo, zur?"

"Say a word to me?" replied the farmer, looking hard at the man. "What about?"

HODGE.—Why, yo zee, zur (a twist), ye do know (a shrug), yo've a hearn, zur,—(a kick and squirm of the right leg).

JOLLY.—What the deuce are you driving at? Do you want some milk for the young un, or the loan of a shilling? You have been caught bagging a hare, perhaps, and if so I cannot help you. We are determined to put down all the poaching hereabouts.

HODGE.—Naaw, zur, it beant none o' thay things. But yo zee, zur, my poor Meary haven a died, an' theer bein' no relashun ov tha womenkind, zur, left to me as I do know on, not a soul to undertaake keer ov tha beaby 'cept Meary, an' her not owld enough nor yet handy to it—

JOLLY.—Do you want me to take charge of it then?

HODGE.—Naaw, zur, but luk ee yere, zur, if zo be as I could a paaid a naabour's wife or daarter to taak keer ov tha little beaby we could a got along braavely, but 't'ud cost dree or four shellin' a-week, and I ken't spear that vrom tha waages I'm a yearnen, yo zee, zur.

JOLLY.—Then go to the Union. I'm one of the Guardians, you know. Get a doctor's certificate of your children's illness and they will give you as much food as you want.

HODGE.—Naaw, zur, thenk ee, not vor I. I aint tha man vor to go an' bag what I aint a yearned, zur. I never did and I never wull if I staarves vor un.

JOLLY.—The more fool you, then. What's the workhouse for but to help the like of you at such times? Why do you set yourself up to be better than other men?

The farmer had hit upon a *quasi-moral* principle applicable to the case, and, as people are apt to do when they are hard up for a good argument, applied it with some asperity.

HODGE.—'Taint 'cause I be better'n my naabors (replied Hodge). Howsomever thof Meary an' I hev a ben put to vor it now an' then, we allus kep clear ov tha Union, 'cept a' times when 'tweren't possible to help it, an', please God, I'll go on vor to do tha same. But doan't ee think, zur, my waages could be rised a couple o' shellin's? (There was a tremendous effort at swallowing when Hodge came out with this.) Yo do know, zur, I've allus ben a spry worker; I'll lay I ken do amoast as much agaen as moast men in

Hankerley, an' I do zaay I'm worth muore than moast.

This was true. Hodge was worth more than any of the men on the farm, both as regarded experience and ability, and had he been paid proportionately would have earned from twelve to fifteen shillings a week. Farmer Jolly was too English not to see the justice of this, but he was too English to own to it when it did not suit him.

JOLLY.—Why, man, you know you aren't paid in that way. You all go share and share alike pretty much, 'cept the ploughman. Don't I give ee a house for nothing and plenty of ale, and draw wood for you? You know very well I can't rise your wages. Every farmer in the neighbourhood would be down upon me.

HODGE (earnestly).—But, measter, is that a raison for not doin' jestice to I? If zo be it be true, yo do know, that I does muore'n tha rest o' tha voke, an' thay aal gets their housen an' aale, an' wood drawed too, then doan't I get the zaame waages as thay?

JOLLY.—Oh, I can't argue with you. Take it or leave it.

HODGE.—Indeed, zur, 'tes the truth, I ken't go along no longer 's I've a ben doin.' We be aal

staarven at whome, an' I aint eat a vit meal thease ten daays.

The farmer saw something playing in the man's eyes, but he said :—

JOLLY.—If it comes to that, am I to starve or you, man? Go up to the house and tell my wife to give ee a loaf and a rasher of bacon, and a quart of new milk for the child. But, look here, sir, don't talk to me or anyone else about rising wages again. If we rise one we'll have to rise all, and it would be dead ruination.

He turned to go, but Hodge was desperate.

HODGE (with sudden energy).—If yo please, zur, that woon't satisfy I. I thenk ee vor tha loaf, an' tha biacon an' tha milk vor tha beaby, but 'taint only oone meal, and 'twoan't keep us very long. I've a towld ee, zur, I ken't live an' work vor ee on nine shellin' a-week, an', what's muore, zur, *I zaay I zeun't.*

Hodge had gradually worked himself up to a pitch of indignant boldness, rare in his slow, passive life. The farmer was surprised and uneasy at it. The whip trembled in his hand.

JOLLY.—D—— it, do you know who you're speaking to, you ungrateful cur, you? You and your family have been living on my place these twenty years, and after all the kindness I've shown

you, and never failing to pay you your wages winter and summer, wet or dry, and gifts at Christmas into the bargain, you turn on me the first time you get into trouble, and ask for more wages. And you'll set all the rest by the ears too, I'll lay on it. Now, look here, Hodge, I give you fair warning, I'll overlook it this time, but, if I hear another word of this sort, off this farm you'll go : and I'll take good care you shall not get work within twenty miles. So, as your friend, I advise you to think of it, and, meanwhile, do the best you can for a week, and if you must have help, go where the others go—the parish is bound to help you.

“They've a sent me back my little un !” cried Hodge, as the farmer strode away. The man's feelings were a compound of regret and indignation. He could not stifle a curious sense of remorse (so imperfect were his moral ideas) that a relation of so many years should be jeopardised by his own act ; it is curious how from long acquiescence or passivity a sense of meanness often attends the act of repulsion or change ; but on the other hand Hodge felt sure that, apart from his special need, his claim was just, and that the farmer had put him off with reasons that were no reasons.

I am not careful to analyse Mr. Jolly's thoughts.

He was a good-natured bucolic in his way, though he was incapable of arguing out any question of morals or of economics very clearly. We cannot be too hard upon him. He was as much the creature, ay ! and the victim of a system, as the other.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL SCIENCE.

BITTER enough, though necessarily narrow and obfuscated, were Hodge's reflections upon this interview with his master. It showed how terrible was the strain of poverty upon him, how resistlessly loud the voice of his children's wants at home, that he mechanically went up to Jolly's house and received the shameful dole the latter had offered him.

It gave the poor man twenty-four hours' respite for thought.

The parish had failed him. His master had repelled him. Hodge now somewhat doubtfully turned to the parson. When State-aid and the law of supply and demand break down, can the Church be relied upon for succour? The Rev. Winwood Leicester, M.A., Vicar of Hankerley, a good living in the gift of the Byrtoms, came into that living only a short time after the present Squire's return from the university. He had consequently seen a good deal of his patron, who, appreciating the

refined and genial qualities of the Vicar, was his most intimate friend. Mr. Leicester was a man of that combination growing more frequent as the age goes on—good family and narrow means. He had brought from Oxford a culture and reputation which it seemed a pity to bury in the sequestered district of Coddleton. Yet he settled down naturally among the landed gentry of his division of the county, to the quiet, monotonous work, social and parochial, of his position. On all hands he was respected. His geniality opened him to the confidence of rich and poor. At Oxford he had imbibed the views of the Tractarians, and in the course of years developed into a moderate High Churchman. In public he appeared in a dress of scrupulously careful cut, not very distantly reminding one of that of a Roman Catholic priest—a similarity enhanced by his felt hat, in which, however, he did not affect the rakishness and ugliness fashionable with some divines.

Mr. Leicester had a curate, who had been recommended to him by no less an authority than Doctor Fussey himself. The Vicar found that his confidence in that authority had placed him in an awkward position. Mr. Linkboy was of the school of newer, more enlightened, more advanced Ritualists. He exceeded the Vicar at every point. His

coat was longer, his waistcoat was of more cassocky pattern, his muslin collar was nearly invisible, and his neck was as religiously dirty as that of any Catholic priest in Christendom, while, to cap all, he wore, overshadowing his white face, a soft, flabby wide-awake hat of such portentous dimensions that the country-folk around had dubbed him the black mushroom—or rather, in the worst circles, ‘twoad-stool.’ Mr. Linkboy, nevertheless, worked hard and conscientiously against the world, the flesh, and the devil. He eschewed the one, he mortified the other, and he did battle with the third in every form of wickedness from drunkenness up to Primitive Methodism. True, he found the people regarded him with aversion as a ‘Papist.’ And his antics both in the church and out of it gave some ground for that suspicion. There were many who thought him duly qualified for the kingdom of heaven in one respect: he had become a fool for the sake of it.

When the curate had buried Mary Hodge he had resolved to visit her family. Twice he dropped in upon little Mary, but his grave manners and astounding hat not only excited her suspicion, but set the greater part of the infant nine off in unsanctified howlings grievous to hear. Amid some such chorus Mr. Linkboy bravely knelt and read some

prayers, and, with proper crossings and ejaculations, invoked on Hodge's children the benediction of Heaven. Hodge heard of these visits with a sort of contemptuous gratitude. "Aw, doan't ee mind un, Meary ; 'taint tha paarson, 'tis tha cureit. Thay *do* zaay he aint oaver bright in tha yead, thof a tries to do a dale of good, so I'm told."

Hodge then, notwithstanding the curate's advances and manifestations of interest, sought out the more genial parson. He slowly went up the small carriage-sweep towards the vicarage, having just passed his wife's grave before he came through the swing-gate from the churchyard, one Spring evening, hearing the lark far up above the steeple, singing of heaven, and for a moment wondering whether the finger of the spire really did point to where Mary had gone.

He timidly hung about the trellised porch, staring at the great Wisteria which traversed the front of the house on one side, and the magnolia which decorated it on the other. The Vicar, from his seat at dinner opposite the window, had seen him coming and recognised the man. With his usual kindness he sent out a glass of beer and some bread-and-cheese, and when, after dinner was over, he came to the porch he found Hodge in a better frame of mind than the latter intended in coming

there. Hodge was not a good church-goer by any means, and Mr. Leicester knew little of him personally ; but his recent loss, and the extraordinary circumstances of Little Hodge's history, were sufficient to give the Vicar an interest in his visitor.

" Well, Hodge, do you want to see me ? " The straight, broad-shouldered clergyman, with his refined face edged with the trim grey whiskers, and the grey curling hair around a well-formed head, smiled genially enough on the troubled peasant. He was a perfect embodiment of the gentleness, kindness, dignity and sunshine of the Church.

" If yo please, zur," replied Hodge, pulling his hat off.

" Well, see, sit down on that seat in the porch and I will take this chair," said the other, easily, as he threw himself into a seat, and delicately used the toothpick he held in his white hand.

" Now, then, how is the little man, eh ? Let me see, ' Little Benjamin ' I christened him. Is he being well taken care of ? "

" Naaw, zur, that be jis tha thing ; ee aint been taaken keer ov, an' ee's looken very bad, zur, this long while. I've 'leven o'm, zur—— "

" Yes, I remember. They sent you home the boy from the Union. Have you not found anyone to take charge of it ? "

“Naaw, zur. Wheer be I to get un taaken chairge on? Yo zee, zur, my waages be but nine shellin’ a-wik, an’ that aint a shellin’ a-piece aal round.”

“Bless my heart, neither it is! You ought to have some help from the Union.”

“I doan’t require no help vrom the Yunion, zur; leestways I doan’t keer to accep’ it. I’d rayther be independent o’m if I ken, zur——”

“But if you can’t?”

“Well, zur,” said Hodge, unable to follow out in words or ideas what he meant, “if I ken’t I’ll staarve.”

“Oh! nonsense, you’re very wrong. Here you are, the father of eleven children, in the position in which God has placed you, and under an obligation to avail yourself of every advantage for them. If your resources are not enough to maintain them, you must get help from the parish, that’s quite clear. You should get the doctor to see the baby, and no doubt he will order it proper nourishment.”

“Well, zur, I’d rayther taake keer on ‘em and do vor ‘em an’ be upsides wi’ tha worold on my own yearnings.”

“Ay, ay! but you can’t, you know, on nine shillings a-week.”

“Theer, zur, yo’ve a hit on un straight!” replied Hodge, his face brightening up a bit. “That’s jis what I do zaay, zur. *I ken’t do un on nine shellin’ a-wik*; but if so be I wer to get faair waages, I mid get along vitly athout comen on tha perrish. Tha waages be too smaal, that’s it, eczacly, zur!”

The Vicar saw that he had incautiously admitted too much.

“Well, but nine shillings is good wages hereabouts, and I suppose Mr. Jolly gives you ale and wood, and all that sort of thing. You can’t have more than is going, my man. Neither you nor I can raise wages you know beyond the market price.”

“I doan’t call ‘em wages, zur, when yo ken’t live on ‘em: an’ yere I be a staarven on my waages, an’ I do zaay, zur, I’d ought to have muore.”

“Have you seen Mr. Jolly?”

“Yes, zur, I’ve a zeed un, an’ ee do zaay as ee ken’t avoord muore, an’ muoreover as th’ other varmers woo’den stand no rise ov waages.”

“I should think not, Hodge, with the Union and out-door relief in its present state. You must learn to be content, man, and don’t wish or ask for more than is to be got. If you are incapable of taking care of all your children, the law entitles you to relief, and it is your duty to take it. As I said

just now," added the Vicar, rising, " Providence has been pleased to place you and me in certain positions. I am not altogether satisfied with mine, you are not satisfied with yours. But don't you see, it is our duty to be contented with our lot and accept with grateful hearts what God sends us. My good man," said the parson, kindly and earnestly, "don't let a spirit of discontent get possession of you. Talk like that you have been having with me will get you a bad name, and may lead to great mischief all round the district."

"Zoo 't wull, I'm afeard, avore long, zur!" replied Hodge. "I doan't mean to zit by an' zee thay childern staarve athout moven, I do zwear, an' theer be muore on 'em as thinks as I think; an' I'd a hoped, zur, as how yo'd a helped us wi' tha varmers, to get us aal a mite muore'n we do get jis now."

Mr. Leicester shook his head.

"Ah! I see," he said, "you little know all that is involved in what you are asking. I'm a minister of the Church. What would the farmers say to me for interfering between them and their labourers? Go home, my man, and think better of it. I'll send Mr. Linkboy to see you to-morrow."

"Beg paardon, zur," replied the man, turning his hat round and round in his hand, "but if thik's tha

cureit, zur, if yo please, zur, ee do frighten tha childern wi's queer looks an' waays, an' my little Meary's 'most afeared o'n. Ee ken't do no good to we, zur, unless ee ken bring cow's milk an' news o' better waages. We doan't none ov us keer vor thay papish pranks, zur. Moast anyone's glad to zee *yo*, zur, any time. Thankee kindly. Good evenin', zur."

The Vicar smiled to himself as he nodded and turned away. The idea of Mr. Linkboy, with his quaint garb and quainter manners, among Hodge's alarmed children for a while excluded the graver reminiscences of the interview; but when these returned he was sincerely uncomfortable lest this should portend the beginning of trouble in the parish. The labour-market everywhere else was excited—would the country lie listless and dead to the crack of doom?

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST RESORT.

FROM the vicarage Hodge wended his way to the house of his friend Timothy Nollekens, the ploughman at Farmer Truscott's. Mr. Truscott held Charnley Farm of the Squire. Halfway down a hill, towards the small stream that, winding with its silver thread through a miniature vale, divided Farmer Jolly's land from Charnley, was a row of cottages called 'Truscott's Cottages.' They had been built for Charnley Farm, under the tenure of Farmer Truscott's grandfather. The present tenant of Charnley was, therefore, a farmer by inheritance, and had you seen his farm you would have said in no other way. Truscott just managed to make ends meet; yet, though his farm had the finest land on the estate, and could have been made to produce, with care, cultivation and capital, twice or even three times its present income, the Squire, from mistaken motives of kindness and because the connection of the Truscotts with the property had

begun under his grandfather, did not disturb his tenant. The latter's case was hopeless, as the Squire's steward well knew, and the man could not have afforded an extra hundred a-year for any purpose whatever. Landlords and labourers and money-lenders have to deal with thousands of such men squatting upon rich English acres even in this day of scientific agricultural progress. The labourer, however, loses the most by it. The other two classes are willing martyrs if they suffer at all.

Timothy Nollekens lived in one of Truscott's Cottages. An undersized man rather was Tim Nollekens, with legs having a tendency to the bandy, and with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit ; but he was long-armed and capable, doing on occasion a day of fourteen hours' work without grumbling. Mrs. Nollekens was rather the reverse of her husband in every particular. She was, in fact, a good complement. Bigger and more spirited than he, she used before her fifth child was born to take her share at the work in the field. From that time she contented herself with the toils of home-management and the cares of home-rule. Of nine children she had lost three : two by scarlet fever, and one by 'wasting'—that is to say, really of a slow fever, generated by the poisoned air of her house, and badly treated by the parish doctor.

God places invisible walls between some people and disease. It was a marvel how the other children escaped the fatal epidemic. No condition which an ingenious devil could have devised for the purpose was wanting in their case. True, they were kept down stairs in the living-room while their brother and sister lay a-bed in the attic above ; but their mother went up and down the stairs, and tended the sick and dressed the healthy with the same fingers and in the same gown. When the poor little bodies had been carried away to be buried, the only disinfectant resorted to was soap-and-water with judicious moderation : the sheets and clothes were mixed and washed with the family linen, and Mrs. Nollekens was too thrifty to throw away the shifts the children died in when she had so many left whom they would fit. The Poor-law medical officer of those days was content to physic existing patients, and did not trouble himself much about preventive medicine—it was not his business.

The spring from which the Nollekens family and the other tenants of Truscott's Cottages drew their water-supply was the rill at the bottom of the slope, where it ran amidst the crowding watercresses, fortunately for the consumers, if modern science be true ; since upon the rise above it, outside the cottages, were cess-pits dug out of the soil. Mrs. Nollekens's

pig lived under her back window, whence everything that could be spared could conveniently reach him. A member of Parliament not long since reflected with some severity on the new-fangled notions about health and health-legislation, instancing the number of hale and hearty Northmen who lived almost over their middens! It would have done him good to put his nose out of Mrs. Nollekens's back window. An hour or two of pillory in that position would have been fatal to his sanitary scepticism, if not to his life. However, we cannot blame Nollekens and his wife for thinking the smell 'healthy' when a legislator agrees with them.

Mrs. Nollekens had not been an unsympathising spectator of Hodge's sorrows. She had gone off a Sunday to drop a tear on the grave of his wife, and had constantly looked in to give Mary a helping hand, or had permitted the latter to bring her charge to the cottage and sit in the chimney-corner for an hour or two. But then the other nine young Hodges were necessarily left in the wilderness, whence Mary found that these absences were likely to be paid for by dear damages or disastrous conflicts at home. Mrs. Nollekens, on the other hand, could not spare much time at Hodge's, so that all the help she could give her neighbour was not very material. It showed sympathy, though, and the widower

thought much of it. He had talked over his case with Tim and his wife, or rather with Tim through his wife, and apprised them of his intention to make a demand on his master for higher wages. Mrs. Nollekens had then said :—

“ La, theer now! ’t beant o’ no use. Do ee spooase Varmer Jolly ’ll gi’ ee more’n tha rest ov ’em? Or do ee spooase tha rest ’ll let ee taake muore’n *thay* get? If a do gi’t to ee a must gi’t to my owld man too. An’ theer’s Jack Horner, he’ve a ben a taalken o’ flitten, ’cause waages be so low an’ work so skeerse. But, bless yer heart, tha varmers thay doan’t keer a straaw. I do count yo’re aal a-cuttin’ one another’s throäts, theer’s so many ov ye in these yere parts.”

Mrs. Nollekens *might* have thought of the nine children she had borne!

Nollekens agreed to this by sagaciously nodding his head and saying—

“ Th’ owld ooman’s right, Jan.”

We have seen that she *was* right. John Hodge, however, was under a pressure that did not affect them, and that pressure was forcing him to solve the problem they were not disposed to entertain. This man was a step beyond them in the Slough of Despond. He and his children were patiently starving. When men reach that point they must either do or die.

Hodge, then, was making his way to Truscott's Cottages, to relate to Tim Nollekens the results of his interviews, and meeting Jack Horner, he invited that worthy to accompany him.

"Theer naw, Jan ! didn't I tell ee ?" said Mrs. Nollekens, combing the tangled hair of her youngest-born with uncomfortable vigour—"drat ee, hold still, I tell ee—Varmer Jolly beant a fool. Spooasin' he wer to listen to ee, Jan, wouldn't tha whoal lot on us be down on un ? Wouldn't tha rest o' tha varmers rate un vor a noggerhead to go and rise tha waages on 'em ?"

"Staay thee theer a minnit, Sally Nollekens," said Hodge, catching a suggestion from her words. "What do ee zaay to this ? Spooasin' the whoal o's wer to agree nar to do no work vor none ov tha varmers athout thay rise tha waages two shellin' a-wik ?"

"Spooasin' thee cuts thy throät !" contemptuously interposed Mrs. Nollekens. She little knew what she was saying.

Indeed Hodge's proposal was so novel and daring that it took the hearers' breath away ; and as it was the first time he had put it in words, it nearly took away the breath of the speaker himself. Mrs. Nollekens as usual would, to a superficial observer, have appeared to be the first to recover herself.

“Well,” she said, confidently, as with a mighty tug not silently endured she brought away the last bothersome knot from Peter’s head, “zummat’s a come oaver ee, Jan, since thy wife a-died.”

“Sally Nollekens, I’m a staarven ; I aint had a vit meal avore to-night vor muore’n a wik. My little Ben, thay went an’ called un, be a sickenen, thof I gets un aal tha milk I ken, an ee knaws vury well thay woan’t none o’m sell none to ee so long as theer be pigs to drink un. Meary’s a worryen to death. Tha rest ain’t haaf fed. It’s only a bit an’ a drop aal round vor ’em : theer clothes is a weären out a zight to zee, an’ thay be a-grawen like little beastesses ’thout a mother to mannige ’em. If zo be a ooman cud be got to look aafter ’em, ’taint possible vur I to paay for un.”

“Ha !” said Sally, sympathetically, Peter’s capillary embarrassments being now completely solved, “if ee wer on’y like zome o’ tha vo’k, ee’d get along bräavely. Look at Absalom Hitchcock ; ee’s tha laazziest bagger i’ tha perrish, but he knaws tha waay to cheat tha Giuardians. Ee’ve allus got a child or so zick abed—thay taakes un by turns, I spooase—an’ tha doctor gi’es un an order vor loaves or zoup—a tidy lot ov em every wik. Yo maay get along perwided yo’ve on’y enough cheek and childern.”

"I wun't do it!" said Hodge, decidedly. "I zaay zummat must be done. If ee wer in my plaace, Sally Nollekens, ee'd zaay zo too. Why, spooasin' ee wer to die to-morrow?"

"Please God, I wun't!" said Mrs. Nollekens.

"Please God, her shaant!" said Tim Nollekens.

"But spooasin', I zaay, her *wer* to die to-morrow, how wo'd Tim mannige wi' all thay young chil-dern? 'Taint in nater to bear it, an' we'd be a pack o' fools to stand it any longer. Le's aal club together an' go in vor a rise o' waages!"

Hodge's desperation was driving him very near the Rubicon. The appeal he had made to the good wife's own uncertainty of life rather went home to her, spite of her disclaimer. She thought there was no greater born fool in the general handling and management of children than Tim Nollekens. He was always letting the babies fall on the stone flags, or on just provocation would send the bigger one's to earth in a manner belying his general meekness. They often suffered vicariously the effects of a resentment he would, if he had dared, have vented on their mother. The idea of leaving *him* in Hodge's position carried to Mrs. Nollekens's mind such a painful picture of domestic helplessness and absurdity, as awakened her to a sense of the position in which they lived and moved.

They were simply skirting a border-land of starvation. Nay, was not one foot over the border?

Jack Horner had been for some time excogitating the wages problem. He was a married man without children, a luxury rare with the poor, if it be a grief common among the rich. His notion was to emigrate—a notion initiated in his mind by some of the navvies on the railway that had been built through that part of the country. It has been little considered how much these lines of road have carried into the still, secluded counties of England, along with the roar and bustle of the traffic they have opened up. The hardy men who built them, many of them travelled from county to county, many from work under foreign contracts, have borne with them to the vacant rustics, in ale-house or roadside gossip, not a few novel ideas, stirring up their sluggish minds to fresh views of rights and duties, of relations and opportunities. Everywhere, too, they have picked up and withdrawn from agricultural life some of the best of the labourers, converting them into new men, more energetic, enterprising and, to tell the truth, unsettled. This alone might be enough to account for the spread of ideas and the uneasiness that now stir the agricultural labouring class to its very depths. These long iron lines have cut into the inert mass of rural

society, and have made it impossible it should ever be the same concrete unity again.

When Hodge came out with the desperate proposal above reported, Jack Horner clapped him on the back.

“Hooray, Jan! that theer’s tha waay to taalk! I tell ‘ee, Sally Nollekens, he’ve a hit tha right nail on tha head. *Yunion es strength*, thik’s tha motter ov our berryin’ club, an’ I zaay if yo yunites vor berryin’ yo mid yunite vor livin’ as well.”

But Nollekens nodded his sagacious head again.

“Doan’t ee go to do sich a thing,” said he. “Yo’ll upset tha country wi’ yer new-fangled noshuns, an’ll rise a drefful sperrit ‘mong tha varmers. Naaw! naaw! be’ye content I zaay. Yere I’ve a worked thease vorty year vor zeven an’ aight an’ nine shellin’ a-wik, I an’ my fayther avore me, on tha zaame varm, an’ thof I do zaay as we aint a yarning so much as we mid a ‘ad we aint staarven yet. Zometimes I’ve a ‘ad a belly-full, zometimes I aint, but I’ve allus lived droo it. Yo leave things aloan, man, an’ yo’ll pull droo. We’ve allus a pulled droo, an’ yo’ll pull droo, if yo do be a put-to vor un.”

“Wull ee shet up!” said Mrs. Nollekens, who began to discern some method in Hodge’s madness. “Thee’d a set theer a hunderd year, an’ watched I

a staarven, *if I'd a let ee!* Thee hastn't no muore sperrit than a rabbit. If zo be as waages be to be meäde to rise by yunion, take oop wi tha yunion like a man, and stand oop vor your rights along wi' aal yer naabors. If on'y I wer a man I do count I'd show ee tha waay!" And the matron flourished an arm of Amazonian mould.

Jack Horner was not much of a talker, but he here put in with a practical suggestion. There were, he thought, nearly sixscore-and-a-half of labourers in their small parish of Hankerley. Let them try and form these into a union like those of the mechanics in towns, and let them send to Sammy Stedman, the Primitive Methodist local preacher over at Yokelbury, to advise them how to go about doing it. This was no sooner bruited than it was declared by all parties to be exactly what they would have thought of it had been put to them. They forthwith resolved to act upon it. So Hodge and his friends had been driven from State, Capital and Church to the dubious powers of Combination and Dissent.

CHAPTER V.

SAMMY STEDMAN.

SAMMY STEDMAN, to whom our small conspirators now referred, lived at Yokelbury, in the next union, in a small cottage owned by himself, to which was attached a piece of land. This he held in fee, an ownership that had had no small influence in making him what he was. Stedman's grandfather, being of thrifty ways, had saved a little money, wherewith he bought a cottage on the edge of Yokelbury Common. To this, by gradual encroachments, unregarded in those days, he had succeeded in adding three-quarters of an acre of land. If the neighbouring landowners and farmers had known how independent a stock would be bred and maintained from this little estate, and the trouble to come out of it for their heirs, successors and assigns, they would I think have abolished it at all hazards. Sammy Stedman's boyhood was warped to some extent by the knowledge that he was going to succeed to this small property, not

worth £10 a-year. He took airs upon himself which made him a zany among village fools. But the Methodists in overrunning the country had reached Yokelbury, where they established a meeting-house, and there one evening they so battered and assaulted Sammy's conscience that he straightway yielded to them, or the power they represented, and became a 'Methody'—nay, not only became a 'Methody' but an enthusiast; and, moreover, feeling some powers aroused within him by the tremendous shaking of mind he had experienced, he took to reading whatever he could lay hands on. Gradually he developed a capable and practical mind. He went beyond the field of religion to other things, among them politics. Newspapers became his craze. He cheated himself of many a meal to buy them, and pored over them till he knew by heart their facts and reasonings. He became a local preacher. Sober and honest as the day, he was admitted on all sides to be a good workman, though his proselytising activities made him an object of suspicion to not a few of his companions and employers. It is melancholy to be obliged to record that Sammy Stedman's case is a clear argument in favour of withholding the Bible from the laity. His study of it, which was earnest and deep, led him to draw

conclusions the reverse of the State-in-which-it-has-pleased-Providence-to-place-you theory. Stedman as he grew more capable was far from willing to be content with the position in which he found himself placed. On the contrary he felt that he was worthy of better things, and he determined to have them. Accordingly, being a methodical man, he argued with his master from the Bible, from natural justice, and from the newspapers that as he was worth more than eight shillings a-week he ought to earn it. The farmer, astounded at this display of perilous erudition from a lad of twenty-two, 'd——d him for his impudence'—one must grant, the only alternative to granting his request. Sammy Stedman thereupon shouldered a bundle and made off to a northern county where, as the newspapers had told him, wages were higher. His wife remained at home, taking charge of the cottage and children; and so for many years Stedman came and went, trudging to various parts of England, and picking up knowledge as a bird does crumbs. At home he was altogether as objectionable a gift of Providence to his parson's day and farmer's generation as ever tried the faith of old-fashioned conservative Christianity. But as Stedman grew more mature, and by saving and hard work established a position of independence and a reputation for thorough know-

ledge of his calling, he was able in his own neighbourhood to command nearly double wages, and had thus acquired a considerable reputation. Farmers and labourers equally consulted him in their difficulties, and respected the honesty and candour which always marked his advice. He acted discreetly, but his mind was always at work on the problems affecting his class, and on these he was constantly urging upon his fellow-labourers the conclusions to which he had come. Hence it was very natural that men on such serious business as was contemplated by Hodge and Horner should think of Sammy Stedman.

The gossip in Hankerley about this bold proposal soon went from house to house in the outskirts of the village where many of the labourers dwelt, and from one farm to another. The rumour was that several men at Charnley had formed a Union. The rural clods were therefore in a state of effervescence. What this Union might be, what it imported, what it involved on the part of its members, what it would do and what it would not, were questions eagerly but foggily discussed at the lounging corner of the Madcap Inn in Hankerley, and in many a field through the cool spring-summer days. Then word was sent round that there was to be a meeting at the Madcap, and thither one

Wednesday evening from all parts of the district began to collect a crowd that astonished the simple promoters. The Madcap overflowed; not much to its benefit, however, for the men seemed too serious and 'queer' to drink. Jack Horner was there, and Hodge, and Joe Wellsby, who had been a town-unionist in his day, and Tim Nollekens, who evinced a disposition to skulk, but was brought up in charge of his wife. Many women also were there in their quaint sun-bonnets and short petticoats, their bare arms wrapped up in their aprons, and they all talked in undertones befitting the gravity of the occasion. Sammy Stedman came over early, and with a few favoured ones sat talking in the inn parlour, every available spot being occupied with the ears of eager listeners. As the meeting numbered several hundreds, it was plain it could not be held inside, and when Sammy Stedman had ascertained the rather crude views of his inviters, he went without, where, raised on a bench on the green opposite the inn, he took off his hat and stood looking down upon as fresh a sight as ever gladdened a man's eyes in merry England.

Men, old and young, sturdy and weak, straight and bent, some with healthy bloom upon their faces, some with worn and weazened and weary counte-

nances ; women here and there, browned and comely, but mostly marked by care and labour : and all these gathered together after years of dumb acquiescence in the intolerable, of ignorant inanity of being, to try to begin a life of fresh thought and action. Somehow or other a shade of sadness and dispirit played over the upturned ranks of faces, as if some disastrous angel had just swept his gloomy wing across them all. There was not a smile to be seen.

Sammy Stedman's face, too, was a dead sea when first he raised his arm for quiet, and he looked as if he were going to commence a sermon ; but in an instant his countenance lighted up as he opened his lips and the people pressed together to catch the first sounds. Sammy was a born orator. He began, in quiet, clear, decided tones—

“ Brothers, we've come together here for a serious purpose, and, considering what that purpose is, I am glad to see so many of you here. I have waited for this day all my life. I have looked forward to it eagerly, but often with despair. For I thought the agricultural working-man was the most degraded of all beings with which I was acquainted. (*Year, year!*) To-day we are all met here to consider our condition, and if so be we find our condition is not what it should be we are to

devise measures, if we can, to relieve ourselves from that condition. Is that it? (*Ees! Ees! Theer it be!*)

“Now, brothers, we’ve got *first* to consider what ‘tis you want, and, *secondly*, how to set about getting it. (*Ah!*) *First*,” said Sammy, dropping insensibly into his preaching manner, and raising his arm with one finger extended to bring it down on his left hand, “*what is it you want?* I’m rejoiced at last to see you all roused up to know that you want anything. That’s the first step in improvement. You must find out your case is a bad un before you’ll set to work to better it; just as in religion we have to begin with repentance from dead works. You show me a man that’s contented with what he is, and I’ll show you a coward or a fool. There’s two sorts of contentment: contentment with the will of God and whatever that brings you, which don’t in any way mean sitting down and thinking He don’t mean to give you anything better if you’ll try for it; and then there’s contentment that sits down idly and wickedly, and lets things go on as they please without an effort to make them better. That’s the sort of contentment that ends in the poor-house.”

“*Year, year!*” shrieked Mrs. Nollekens, in a voice that thrilled the whole audience and woke

them up to a general laugh, as she dug her angular elbow into the side of Tim Nollekens.

“ Well, now, your friends here, the committee—(*Oh, they've a farmed a committee, then! Year, year!*)—tell me they've ascertained that you aren't satisfied with your wages—(*cheers*)—nor your way of livin', nor your childern's present condition and future prospects. (Mrs. Nollekens's approbation was vociferous.) And among you there's John Hodge, whose situation is a *reducshun at absurdity*—that is, he's reduced to a laughing-stock, because he's like a male pig left with eleven young uns to feed and no means of feedin' them.”

This coarse joke was too truly rural not to be received with shouts of laughter, Hodge himself joining in with no small gusto.

“ Well, here's three things you've found out, as I found them out long ago, and there's many more I could mention to you. There's your position. You have no political rights, no representation in Parliament. You haven't any knowledge of the great questions arising to affect your welfare, and if you had 'twould only embitter your lot, because you could do nothing to remedy it. You're bound hand and foot to the farmer, and he's bound to his landlord, and so we have in what's called 'free and merry England' this day two bands of

slaves, handcuffed, as it were, one to the other. Well, if the better band of slaves—that's the farmers—is contented and won't wake up and do something to shake theirselves free, then the worser band, the labourers, must rise and do it."

Sammy Stedman's oratory went a little over the heads of the folk in this passage, but what with his clear, ringing voice and kindling manner they seemed to take it all in, and it worked like yeast in the unleavened minds of the listeners. They cheered to the echo. Meanwhile the noise had attracted several farmers to the spot, and the Curate's mushroom hat flapped gloomily in the background.

"Then," he said, "there's questions a rising between us and the parson. I've got nothing to say personally against any of the clergy in this neighbourhood. They takes their pay and says their prayers, and manages their parishes as well as any folk could do—(*alight underd a-yeer! Ay, an' a passonage!*!)—but I do say this of the parsons as a body, and if there is one here," said Sammy, looking straight at the Curate's felt hat, "I hope he won't be offended—I say they ought long ago to have taken notice of the terrible state of things around them, and have boldly preached their duty to the farmers. They've been preaching to us to

be contented with Providence—why didn't they preach to *them*, as *their* Master did, about the duty of the rich? There's a text for them in one of the epistles, and perhaps the reverend gentleman I see listening to me will take a note of it and preach a sermon from it some day: '*Go to, now, ye rich men. Behold, the hire of your labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth, and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth.*'"

This passage, delivered with all his force, made a deep impression upon the people. One or two of the farmers hissed, and in a moment the fierce spirit that underlies the character of the patient hind broke out with threatening fury. A Babel of cries arose, above which Mrs. Nollekens's voice ruled pre-eminent, and the crowd turned round upon the intruders. At this moment the great mushroom hat was pushed in between the labourers and the small knot of farmers.

"Gentlemen," shouted the Curate to the latter, taking off the hat and waving it frantically, "for God's sake don't excite the people by useless insult. They may be right or they may be wrong, but they are entitled to hold their meeting and say what they please, and I beseech you not to provoke them to violence."

Hodge, Horner, and Nollekens had rushed to the front, where still better men were ready to vindicate the right of public meeting, and their eyes met those of Jolly and Truscott in an angry encounter not to be forgotten. The farmers affected contempt.

“O go on,” said Jolly, “we’ll not interrupt ee. This aint the place to discuss the question.”

The Curate’s hat went on, but he still stood between the parties, while everyone, trembling now with excitement, turned again to the speaker.

“Well, the priests, who have been the witnesses of your misery and need, have not helped you, and the masters won’t help you. (*Year, year!* said Hodge)—and the Parish won’t help you, leastways those of you that are honest, and the landlords won’t help you, and even God won’t help you unless you help yourselves; so you must resolve this day to take your stand for what you mean to do. *Quit yourselves like men, be strong.* I tell you frankly this is no light or easy matter. You may have to suffer a good deal. It will be a hard fight, but it will be a glorious victory. Now, if we are to combine to better our condition, what are we to ask for?”

“Muore waages,” grunted a lazy fellow in the background, whose pockets nursed his hands far more than was required by the work they did.

“ Better housen,” said a shrill voice not very far from the speaker. It was that of Sally Nollekens. “ Dacent housen an’ a gaarden, maaster, an’ twenty shellin’ a-wik, I zaay.”

The crowd was easily amused. It laughed consumedly at the good wife’s proposal. The rustic simplicity, so fascinating to amiable sentimentalists and poets, so advantageous to employers, came out conspicuously when practical Sammy Stedman asked them to formulate their demands. They could not do it. They had only dipped their feet in the edge of the water, and were not ready for a plunge. They scarcely knew as yet whether to be in earnest or not, though they meant to be terribly in earnest. They only felt their state to be intolerable, and, in fact, I rather think, shrank from the responsibility of suggesting their own remedy. This shyness, the result of ignorance and long repression, was afterwards used against them by their opponents. They set down the whole movement to ‘agitators.’ So long had they been under authority, coming and going, doing or refraining, at the behest of those with whom their relations were in general kindly, that they would thank anyone, any *Deus ex machinâ*, who would come to them and declare what were honest requirements and how to get them. Sammy Stedman was the convenient

divinity of the moment. He pulled up Sally Nollekens.

“No, Mrs. Nollekens, 'twon't do to talk too large at first. There aint many farmers, farming as they do, as can afford twenty shillings a-week, and there aint many men, as prices go, worth twenty shillings. I don't go for all getting the same price. We must help all up to a certain point, and then above that it's the most to the best. Now, let's see. You're most of you getting 9s. and 10s. a-week and your beer, I s'pose, which they reckon at £1 13s. 6d. a-year, and what they call ‘perquisites’ and Christmas gifts. Putting all these together and considering the beer goes into your stomachs, can you live fit to work and keep your families decent and comfortable on what you get?”

“Naäw!” came in a tremendous chorus from the audience.

“Then the least you can any of you ask is what'll do that. You are part of the farmer's machinery, and you require to keep up steam or you'll run down, and you can't work unless you have enough to keep the fire going, and the water boiling, and the machinery oiled. That's the first point—what they call a *minimum*. When you've got that how much more are you entitled to?”

“Sheer o’ profits,” said two or three together, who had followed his argument and perceived its drift.

“Yes. Some share, big or little, of the profits. I say you put your labour into the venture just as your master puts his money into his land and his skill into his venture, and so all that are in the venture should have a share in the profits resulting from it.”

O Sammy Stedman, Sammy Stedman, here are you tripping sadly! The selling price of a man’s labour theoretically includes not only what is to keep the machinery in order, but the profits to him, whatever they may be, over and above the wages which the condition of the labour-market enables him to earn. If that be so he must get *his profits* out of his wages, and is no more entitled to a share of the capitalist’s profits than to a room in the capitalist’s house. Is my greengrocer to turn upon me at Christmas for profits on everything he has sold me, on the ground that he has all the year been selling to me at a loss? The selling price of a cabbage includes the return for cost of production and the profit. This latter proportion truly is very variable and very doubtful in its collection, but, nevertheless, normally and theoretically it forms some proportion of all wages and all prices.

Sammy Stedman's fallacy was a common one. It was, however, the shadow or substitute for the truth. There is a mediocre standard of labour which must be governed by the rule above stated ; but undoubtedly there is also a sort and style of work that involves something more than that. Put a man on his mettle. Show him that he can do something above a low average, can double production or improve quality, and he does it for you. Is he then entitled to no share of the profits? For in this case he brings into the combination to produce results an extra element, the only one capable of expansion and intension, the capital and ordinary labour being the fixed quantities, but this being an elastic factor. Whether or no he be held *entitled* to a share of the profits, surely in that case it would be good policy and good economy to give it to him. The alternative is that of paying for his extra skill and intensity a 'fancy' price, and running the risk upon that as well as on the standard wage. However, if Sammy Stedman has got out of his depth, the cue of all concerned is not to rail at him and spitefully use him, but gently entreat him, for he is an honest man and one waiting upon truth.

I do not propose to report any more of Stedman's speech. He went into his 'secondly,' and

showed them that individually they could make no stand or head against the firm phalanx of landlords' and employers' interests ; that here and there some might receive attention and justice from good-hearted employers, but that the only practical and sure way of gaining equal ground with their masters in contracting for wages was to unite and support each other, and that a combination formed on principles of mutual aid, of justice to themselves and justice to the farmers, would be the foundation of a better edifice of life for them all.

The effect of all this on the hearers, who stood nearly two hours patiently hearing it out, was very notable. It was true, as one said who stood by and watched it, that *you could see the scales falling from their eyes*. The men were made new men. They had taken steps in thought and action. Never again could they be the patient, acquiescent creatures whose docility was the admiration of sciolists, who drew from it the conclusion that this uncommercial and 'almost family' relation was ordained of Heaven ! A resolution was arrived at to form a Union, destined to be a dangerous enemy to that other Coddleton Union which had hitherto ruled the district. It was then that the celebrated 'Coddleton Charter of Labourers' Rights' was drawn up, and, lest it should be

unknown to any of my readers, I transcribe it in full :—

“ *We, the undersigned labourers of Coddleton, are of opinion that we are not treated as we ought to be between man and man.*

“ *We therefore request to be treated otherwise.*

“ 1. *Our complaint is we must have better wages.*

We are only getting from 9s. to 11s. a-week (some 8s.), and such of us as has families hereby declare that it is not possible to keep them on this sum per week. Moreover, we respeckfully submit wages is risen in all departments but the agricultooral laborer. He is still a surf.

“ 2. *Our cottages—at least most of us—is not fit for human beings to live in.”*

[A scene when this is under discussion ; Mrs. Nollekens, with great vehemence and no little plausibility, insisting that a rider shall be added to this effect—“ Speshully housen on Charnley Fearm, an' wust ov aal Jan Nollekenses, wich tha size an' tha rottenness on un is past enduren.” But the meeting persists in adhering to general statements, and remits Mrs. Nollekens to her private remedy.]

(Continued.) "Furthermore, the cottages is held by the week of the farmers, who consequentially can turn us out whenever they choose, and do so without notice if so inclined. We therefore pray for cottages of our own, near the farms, by the year, at a reasonable rent, to be paid out of our wages.

"3. Likewise there is many cases where a man has no garden, and can't grow any potatoes or vegetables. In all such cases we respeckfully beg that a small piece of land should be hired out to them, or given with the cottage if convenient.

"4. Also there is cows. We think the father of a family ought to be able to keep a cow and pervide milk for his childern. This some gentlemen gives their best men, and we request it will be allowed to all such as have familics."

[The irrepressible Sally Nollekens heroically fights at this juncture for the introduction of a clause in favour of pigs, and gets some strong support; but again the general verdict is against her, leading to her declaration amidst great laughter, "That theere paaper's called a chairter, but I calls un a cheäter. If zo be ee drars out a paaper drar

un out braävely, an' don't gi'e it un aaf an' aaf like. Lor' bless tha chicken hearts, if zo be *I* could ha' wrote un *I'd* a drarred a ch—ch—chairter woold a made tha varmers zweet in theer shirts, I warrant un ! ”]

“ 5. *Our agreement is that wages shall be 16s. in harvest, and 14s. through the winter. Also we will not take less than 3 pence the hour, or the equivalent, for task work.*

“ 6. *We hereby agree to form a Union for the above objects, and pledge ourselves to stand by each other till we succeed.”*

Such were the resolutions come to that May evening on Hankerley Common—resolutions containing errors propounded with the quaintest naïveté, pregnant, nevertheless, with serious meaning. The dread principle of Combination, hitherto confined to towns, had burst its bounds, and for good or evil inoculating the yokels, was destined thenceforth to be a permanent power in country life. Who could calculate or measure the results that would flow from this portentous occurrence ?

A levy of 3d. each upon all signers of the Charter was made for preliminary expenses, and a committee appointed, with Sammy Stedman as chairman,

to communicate with the farmers. Finally, it was resolved that should they fail in obtaining the advance of wages asked for they should strike.

Strike! A word sending terror to the hearts of capitalists, harrowing landowners, employers, and consumers alike! A word to make squires and farmers, thinking of their scattered halls and farm-houses, their exposed ricks, their ranging cattle and sheep, tremble with apprehension.

The word *Union* was enough for them! It transferred them from the peaceful air of the country to the revolutionary atmosphere of the great towns. It brought before their eyes visions of murdered masters, 'rattened' machinery, burning factories, tyrannical rules, truculent and disorderly meetings, and, above all, the terrible powers of Strike. A word too long associated with secret conspiracy and dark deeds of violence, and malicious destruction, and harsh laws sternly administered, and reprisals and animosities in what ought to have been the holy brotherhood of Capital and Labour. Everything evil that ever came out of or was attached to the idea of Unions was conjured up to their imagination by the word; and to all this heritage of scandal and horror, without the solemnity of any deed of transfer, succeeded the unfortunate Union that was born at Coddleton out

of the exigencies of Little Hodge. Very few stopped to inquire what these men were really wanting, what they had really resolved to do. In fact, the very terms were enough to damn the whole proceeding. They asked more wages, they had drawn up a Charter, *they had formed a Union!* THEY THREATENED A STRIKE!! What more need be said? This was the end of social peace, a blow at the roots of society, the death-warrant of the country. It was forgotten, naturally enough, that the name 'Union' no longer meant a secret conspiracy, but an open combination, recognised and protected by law; that the reasons for the old acts of violence had vanished, and that the occasional reappearance of truculent force in certain localities was exceptional, and always reprehended by the leaders of the best town Unions; and, above all, that there were Unions and Unions; that that which disfigured the rules of the one was not to be found in another; that Unions need no more be copies of one another than all joint-stock companies need engage in the same business, or be subject to the same rules. In failing to note this fact the squirearchy and their tenants made their first trip in tactics, and lost an opportunity, by early and conciliatory negotiation, of giving to the Charter a shape harmonising with the different

circumstances of rural life, and securing them from outbursts of unjust and angry caprice on the part of their labourers. But the die was cast, and it was for Death to the Union. The fatal results of this blunder we have yet to trace.

But what if, after all, their real resentment arose more from this, that the very mention of higher wages to men, farming badly and overweighted with rent, and too often living more like men of leisure and fortune than agriculturists, was a strain too excessive for bucolic stoicism to endure ?

CHAPTER VI.

A CURIOUS BETHEL.

I HAVE not yet described Hodge's home. It was a cottage which had the advantage of standing by itself at a corner of the farm near the road. It had no doubt been built away from the other cottages on the farm in order that the tenant should command the entrance to that part of it. It had existed time whereof the memory of man ran not to the contrary. 'Twas a thick rubble-walled place, of a dingy ochre tint, with a heavy thatched cap of great antiquity, and small windows with leaden casements and diamond-shaped panes. It stood in the garden of which a survey has already been given. Inside, the floor was paved with uneven flags. Ten feet by twelve was the dimensions of the room, the two extra feet one way including the chimney-place ; a low, unceiled room that had once been whitewashed. The furniture was a deal table, well scrubbed in Mrs. Hodge's days, a swinging deal shelf, two or three fixed

shelves, an old bench, three chairs, and a stool. Up on the high mantel-board were three gaudily-coloured crockery figures—the Duke of Wellington with a red and green uniform, a ruby nose, and cheeks of inebriated hue, supported by a blue and yellow lion startant—stare-ant on one side, and a sheep couchant alb on a field gules and verdant on the other. The only other ornament was an old almanac many a year since pasted on the walls, and now exhibiting a dingy and fly-specked face harmonising with its background. There were two brass candlesticks, one of which had bent beneath the weight of time. Behind an old piece of baize were concealed the family tea-cups and saucers. The rest of the family crockery was easily accommodated on one of the fixed shelves aforesaid, and the family plate, consisting of an iron ladle and a couple of metal teaspoons, reckless and fortuitous in its habits, was always of uncertain locality. A door at the back opened on a small bricked square, about four feet across, from which covered stairs to the attic went up along the side of the house. They had not far to go. The lower room was only eight feet high. The upper with its sloping roof, lighted by dormer windows through the thatch, just permitted Hodge to stand upright in its centre. Its contents were a bed, or low wooden frame

upholding a mattress, a settle in under the eaves, and a loose mattress in the other corner. The only carpet in the house, an old piece of felt, lay beside the parental couch. I hope it will not be considered vulgar to tell the truth that before and after Mrs. Hodge's decease Mary slept in the same bed with her father. Thank God, they were simple folk !

Such was the house. Yet outside, with its deep dark thatch, small windows and low elevation, it was very picturesque, and anyone passing by might have said that 'it was amazing to see the comfort and attractiveness of English cottage-life ;' for jessamine climbed over the remnants of the rotted porch in front, honeysuckle wreathed the window, and Mrs. Hodge had always maintained some annual creepers overrunning the back door and festooning the outside staircase. If comfort could have come out of aesthetic gratification, possibly these poor people might have led a tolerable life.

In this theatre of rural bliss, while the plot was thickening for the formation of the Union and the declaration of rustic rights, the starvation and distress of Hodge's family increased in a geometric ratio. It had not taken many weeks to bring the few weeds the poor dead woman had so aptly managed in keeping her children decently clad, into a

condition to strike even Hodge's uninstructed eye. Whenever Mary could get little Hodge's stomach and voice to come to a truce and be quiet, no easy task with the food the child was dry-nursed upon, you might have seen her standing on a stool over the big half-barrel that formed the wash-tub, and plunging her small arms into the indifferently lathered water in a womanly attempt to wash the family linen, or sitting down with the paste-board box that had long done duty as a work-basket and with willing but indifferent stitches skewering together the disintegrating garments of her brothers and sisters. Pale and dark under the eyes, with whitening lips, the brave little woman sat and faced with steady courage the growing horrors of her situation, and whiles she sang, and whiles she cheered the others with her motherlike talk, and whiles she encouraged them to go and gather sticks in the coppice for the morning fire. Then sometimes, when she was left alone, you might have seen her lay her weary, troubled little head on the table-edge, and weep over the memory of her mother dead and her own living experience of sorrow and care.

Little Hodge grew daily more sickly and troublesome. Mary had twice or thrice obtained medicine from the dispensary for him, but peppermint

drops were a poor stimulant or sedative for his complaint. He wanted milk and food. She had discovered it was now impossible any longer to conceal the other children's necessities from their father. They must either have some more clothes or go to bed, said Mrs. Nollekens. The poor man himself had once or twice thoughtlessly remarked on their raggedness, and reproached the child by recalling their appearance under her mother's hands. How little had he estimated what that implied when the poor woman was living! How many husbands ever do?

Hodge had come home, and was sitting waiting for supper. There was part of a great brown loaf on the table, and Tummas had picked a few watercresses, which with some salt completed the set-out. Tea was brewing on the hearth: one teaspoonful of village tea to the quantity of water a man could drink after a day's work. But he had had his beer. Little Hodge lay in the well-used box, the cradle of the Hodge family.

“Fayther,” Mary said, as she sat and watched him eating the meal, “what's to become o' we, fayther?”

Hodge stopped, with a large piece of bread and a bunch of watercresses between his teeth, quite aghast that Mary should have hit upon the very

question that was the burden of his thoughts morning, noon, and night.

"Ay, Meary," he said presently, "what's to become o' we, Meary? God knaws—I doan't."

"Fayther," she said, painfully, "I've a done aal I can to zaave, an' tha money's aal gone, an' your shellin' owin' to tha biaker, an' tha dairyman to Charnley towld Tummas a coodn't let un bring no muore milk athout tha coppers. An', fayther, theer's skeersely no clothes left to we childern, an' indeed, fayther, 'taint my fault, but everything's a wearen out, an' there be need o' a rare lot o' money to get 'em aal new clothes. I've muggled along, but 'taint no use to try to mend 'em no muore." And so Mary broke down and cried, and Hodge's grim face grew more grim and strange as he sat and looked at her.

"God help us!" he said; "I kent abear un much longer."

"Yer's poor little Ben, fayther, ee've skeersely took a thing vor muore'n two daays. Ec cried hisself to zleep. Luk at un." She uncovered the tiny face. "Ec's amost like a corpse, fayther, beant un?"

"Ha," replied the father, with a long, deep-drawn sigh, "poor little Ben! And 'tes aal along o' he we be zo trubbled. Us cood a speered

un, Meary, 'thout missen un, if the Lord had zo wulled."

"O naw, fayther," and Mary's arms went round the child, as its dying mother's had done, with affectionate energy, waking it up, "I coodn't a speered un, fayther—sh—sh—sh!—naw, nor I woodn't a speered un *then!* Theer, theer—sh—sh—sh!" And so Hodge got up and went out, leaving Mary to quiet the embarrassing youngling.

When, an hour later, he returned, Mary had gone to bed. As he lit the remains of the candle and it flickered up over his face, once so cleanly shaven, now bristling with the careless growth, it showed an odd light in his eyes. He moved about and made some dispositions in the room. He took off his boots and went upstairs, and out of the chest selected a few things which he brought down and made into a bundle. Then, stretching himself on the floor, with his head on the bundle and his coat over him, he went to sleep.

As the streaks of morning began to brighten into a fan of long light shafts upon the eastern sky, the man, rising from his hard bed, donned his coat and kerchief. He then counted the money in his pocket, amounting to two shillings and ninepence, wrapping half of it in a piece of paper which he laid on the table, and retaining half for his own use.

He laid some wood for a fire, and brought in some water. Near the money on the table he put a knife and a carrot or two he had brought home the night before, so that Mary might find them ready for the morning meal. His bundle was on the table beside his stick and hat, his large clogs were placed opposite a chair ready to be put on at the last moment, when Hodge stole upstairs to take a farewell look at his children. Here were Tummas, and Sally, and Ned, and Jack all mingled together in glorious confusion in the corner ; there were the others on the settle, and he kissed them every one. Lastly he looked at Mary, who lay with his latest diminutive item of despair asleep on her arm. At *her* he looked with fast-gathering tears.

“God bless ee, Meary dear ! How like she do look to her mother ! God knaws it cuts my heart, Meary, to turn my back on ee an’ leave ee to thyself wi’ aal tha rest—’t do, ’t do ! But I ken’t help it ; how ken I ? Theer, if I goes, tha Perrish’ll taake keer on ’em, and mebbe eddicate ’em, and give ’em a staart i’ tha worold ; but vor my peart, what cood I do vur ’em but staarve ’em ? ”

He bent over the sleeping girl.

“Meary,” said he “good-bwye. It pricks I terrible to leave ee, Meary,” and a drop from his eye

fell on her cheek. It disturbed her. She half opened her eyes, but she was heavy with weariness and turned away her head again, unconscious that she had received a parting tribute of her father's love.

Then John Hodge stood up with his head touching the rafter, and said solemnly—

“If so be that Godamitey do bless me wheer I’m a goin’ in furrin pearts, an’ I’ve a luck o’ good waages, an’ sich a living as’ll suffice to keep us aal comforble en Kenedy, I’ll zend hwoam vur ce aal ; I wull, so help me God !” said John Hodge, adopting a court phrase.

And then with no ascending or descending angels visible to him, no voice of Bethel ringing in his ears, he went down the stairs, and, how he knew not, laced up the huge clogs, seized the stick and bundle, and, driving his old felt hat down tightly over his brow, turned his back on his home, his children, his parish, his parson, his master, the Guardians, and the British Poor-law.

* * * * *

The execrable cowardice of this man makes my heart bleed. I find in him many of the best elements of human nature ; sacrifice, faithfulness through long and frequent trials to a first love and to love’s progeny ; tenderness of heart ; a gentle-

ness that testified itself in rarely-forgetful acts of home courtesy ; a homely and simple piety, of a sort that recognized God, though in a puzzled way to account for the consistency of that belief with the facts of his own daily experience ; a man who never wronged a neighbour, never quarrelled, never defrauded his master of anything but an hour's work on some sleepy day when his eye was off him : this was the recreant, cursed craven who on a May morning, basely deserted and left upon the guardians and ratepayers of Coddleton Union, eleven children, including Little Hodge.

PART III.



UNION AND DISUNION.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOURNAMENT OF CAPITAL AND LABOUR.

WHILE Hodge was thus blindly seeking to cut for himself the knot of fate, the event whereof he and his offspring had been the prompting cause began to be blown about and to create an excitement through the whole country. To half the hearers it was a portent of terror and evil; to others it was glad tidings of the salvation of a hitherto hopeless class. Philanthropists, sentimentalists, sociologists, ay, and socialists: Radicals, Nonconformists, Chartist, advocates of women's rights, the anti-Game law people, Trades-unionists, social and political sciologists—it must, for the sake of truth, be confessed that some or all of these did forthwith effervesce in sympathy for Hodge, whose story, in every style of newspaper-English, from the vivid and graphic periods of the greatest of war-correspondents, to the crude simplicities of country reporters, was expanded in columns of type, bought and read with avidity on every

hand. Is there any incident—religious, horrible, profane, or pathetic—out of which in these ingenious days no one can make any capital? The voice of the Hankerley labourers went into many hearts. And when raging editors boiled over with vicarious indignation for their bucolic patrons, and landowners palpitated in the face of this new upheaval, one and all nevertheless admitted that much was to be said and much to be done for the tillers of the soil. But, what it was clear to these persons in their fury, and what above all they protested was what ought not to be done, was this: to disturb the genial quiet, the gentle harmony of country associations by irruptions of Trades-unionism—to inoculate Hodge, Styles, and Nollekens with the doctrines of economy. These were the peculiar heritage of the cities. For, it was asserted, the relations of employers and labourers in the country were the growth of grateful centuries, and ordained of Heaven; a relation of patriarchal form and simplicity; a sacred combination wherein to push the rude car of commercial principles was to break a circle of organised affections and destroy the arrangements of Providence. These arguments appeared in print.

Certainly there was much to account for this hysterical rhetoric. Had not the Trades-unions in

the towns at once passed resolutions of sympathy and poured their brotherly gifts into the treasury of the infant combination? Did not social sciolists precipitate themselves upon Hankerley, each with a separate nostrum for the bewildered rustics? Had they not already been asked to look forward to the separation of Church and State, the alteration of the county franchise, and the re-distribution of seats? Had not Radical associations sent resolutions of congratulation and opened subscription-lists? Had not the Land League—*omen monstrosum!*—recognised the movement as a step in the right direction? Were not ‘epileptic M.P.’s’ and officious pamphleteers, ‘eager for notoriety’ and ‘moved by a pure spirit of mischief,’ rushing to the scene of action and venting their crude platitudes upon the hapless hinds? In fact, were not the whole of that numberless, aimless, irrepressible, fidgety, bothersome, dangerous set of people which can be classed under the name of AGITATORS converging on Hankerley, and dancing their demonstrative fandangoes before all the world, in scandalous delight at the mischief that was brewing? If the movement had been a bad one it had certainly damned been by its friends.

But it was little wonder if all this happened! No marvel if, besides all this, in many a quiet

home in England gentle hearts beat with excitement and generous souls quickened into sympathy that the day of the labourers' resurrection had come; for it was natural to such souls to rejoice when they heard, '*Thy brother was dead and is alive again: he was lost and is found.*' It was the rich elder brother who grudged the joy. From a death worse than death, the inertness and ineptitude of ignorant content, Hodge had wakened to life, and his class with him. How it fared with Hodge himself we shall see: how it fared with Hodge's work only the Book of Time and the Apocalypse of Eternity will show.

The Labourers' Charter was printed and a copy served on each of the farmers within the limits of the Coddleton district. At the same time a notice was given that the rate of wages stated in the Charter would be insisted upon. Most of the farmers were inclined to receive this news as a joke, but those who had attended the Hankerley meeting soon undeceived them. Jolly, Truscott, and their companions had that evening assured themselves that the men were in earnest, though they were certain that the movement had no backbone. At the end of a week, by arrangement, all the labourers in Hankerley took their week's wages and left their work. The farmer who got

up early on Monday morning in faith that it was a joke, was himself cruelly hoaxed. Horses, hoes, harrows, bill-hooks, or what not, rested from their labours, and not a man was to be seen. In twenty-four hours a meeting of employers was called. Squire Byrton took the chair. He was supported by many neighbouring landowners, by Mr. Leicester, and the incumbents of two other parishes. Sammy Stedman laughed when he read this in the County Chronicle. The parsons were playing into his hands. If at this meeting there was more heat than argument it should not be reflected upon. It was natural. Time must needs elapse and the movement grow stronger, before the interest so weakly attacked would bring itself to attempt to formulate a defence. It was simply considered and resolved that the mere notion of a strike in the county was unendurable; that those present would to a man 'resist the introduction into the agricultural system of that principle of Unionism which had been the curse of the country, setting class against class, and destroying those happy relations which ought to exist between employers and employed.' I quote the words of Mr. Leicester. They were reiterated by the chairman, they were cheered by the meeting. Two or three gentlemen admitted that wages were too low

and ought to be increased ; but as a preliminary to the performance of their duty in this respect, the farmers resolved to repudiate the organisation which had opened their eyes to a fact they had before refused to recognise. Notably Mr. Jolly, who would not harken to John Hodge's appeal for better pay, now suggested that it would be a wise policy to raise the wages of non-Unionists. Every-one agreed that Unionists must be 'locked out,' and Squire Byrton announced his intention of evicting any Unionist who tenanted his cottages.

—Thus the social war was declared. The gauntlet thrown down on one side was taken up by the other, and each party set lance in rest for the coming fray. The trumpets were blown by the heralds of the Press, while an excited crowd of spectators cheered and counter-cheered the barbarous spectacle. In this way, O Christ-regenerated England ! heir to nineteen centuries of Christian love, does the awful tournament of Labour and Capital still join its deadly issues before most Christian sovereigns and a most Christian people !

The effect of the master's challenge was to arouse precisely that spirit of resentment which could alone give strength to the weaker hinds. They received the notices of eviction with stolidity. Many who had not joined the movement now

attached themselves to it: they completed their organisation: Sammy Stedman became Chairman, Jack Horner the Secretary. Labour all over the country was in a ferment: the agricultural districts seethed with an excitement which threatened to spread into every county. At the suggestion of some Metropolitan Unionists a singular course was resolved upon. It was agreed that the battle should be fought out within the limits of Coddleton district. A general understanding was arrived at that not a single labourer should pass the bounds into the district to help the farmers, so that the latter might be left to solve their difficulties with the labour that faced them. At present they felt pretty strong. The May blossoms were yet upon the hedges, their seed was in the ground, and they could for a few weeks afford to go short-handed. By the time they were ready for the men they had no doubt the latter would come in. The story of this great representative struggle I now propose to write.

CHAPTER II.

AN INARGUABLE CASE.

OF all the men to whom the Labourers' Charter had given offence, Squire Byrton was the most offended. Manly, generous, open-hearted, with an affection for a servant that obeyed, and a contempt for servility in a gentleman ; with a high reverence for the Church, and utter detestation of the obscure sects which spring like mushrooms under its great Gothic shadow ; with a supreme admiration for the established order of things, and an ineffable scorn for those who would disturb that sacred stability ; putting Radicals, Infidels, Trade-unionists, and Nonconformists in the same pot of wrath for a day of wrath—'twas no wonder that the bile was stirred within him by this atrocious outbreak of all the obnoxious powers in sight of the windows of his ancestral home.

When he returned from the meeting at Coddleton his discomposure was visible to his family. A large and squarely family was Mr. Byrton's.

The noble-looking dame at the end of the table ; the fair-faced, clear-eyed, cherry-lipped girl at his side, with her golden-rippling tresses, his own image and eldest-born ; the two ruddy sisters, with their mother's brown hair and eyes ; the younger boys, sunburned and healthy, down to wee Caroline, the flaxen-curled pet of the household—the Squire could look round proudly and look forward hopefully at his family board.

Emily was a woman, now one-and-twenty, slender, and straight, and tall, and crested as a graceful palm-tree. What wonder that her beauty and grace had won the heart of Henry Ewbank, Esquire, Barrister-at-Law, a man on the Western Circuit, son of Sir Henry Ewbank, of Ewbank, not ten miles away from Byrton Hall ? And what wonder that he, a fine young Englishman, with a plain open face, a noble brow, a manly character, and great natural parts, should have attracted the affections of the somewhat secluded girl ? Young Ewbank came out a good fourth at Cambridge, and, relinquishing the sports of the country and the miserable occupation of waiting for the death of a father whom he wished not to die, took to the Bar, where he was not without hope of success. Sir Henry and Mr. Byrton were of the same politics and fast County friends. The latter looked with

satisfaction upon the projected alliance with the Baronet's family. There was only one drawback. The young man 'had notions.' He took his father's name with pride, but held his father's politics in derision. In religion and politics he thought for himself, and without the prejudices of his caste. In fact, the Squire twitted his daughter with her engagement to a 'Radical.' Emily Byrton bore it very calmly. To tell the truth she had used her leisure and an active mind to some purpose, and was not by any means one of the doll-like creatures which modern sociology depicts as an object of reform. Henry Ewbank was delighted with the freshness and earnestness of her thoughts ; but he was a prejudiced witness, let us not overrate her.

When the Squire came home from the meeting, and, after dressing in considerable heat, sat down at his table with his face in an apoplectic state of indignation, Emily ought to have permitted him to discharge his indignation unhindered. But mischief was in her eyes and looks when she saw her father's embarrassment, and there was a sympathy in her heart she could not perhaps have suppressed.

"*For what we care about to receive the Lord make us truly thankful,*" said the Squire, as if he were angry with

the Almighty and meant to pay Him off by a sulky grace.

“Well, papa, how did you get on at your meeting?”

“Oh! capitally—quite unanimous. We have decided on action that is sure to bring these poor fools to their senses.”

“Are you going to imprison them?”

“No; I wish we could,” said the Squire. “If it hadn’t been for those cowardly Radicals we should have had the Combination Laws to use in such a case as this. There never was a wickeder conspiracy.”

“Do you really think there was a conspiracy, or don’t you think that these poor men are really underpaid and have been forced to this of themselves? You know Henry goes about talking to them when he is down here, and he told me they were wretchedly underpaid. He is trying to get his father to move in the matter.”

“Oh! He goes about talking to them, does he? Well, that accounts for it. We have ‘viewed’ the original conspirator,” said the Squire, with a grave face.

“But he did not put any ideas into their heads, you know. He only asked questions; because he told me he did not like to raise hopes that seemed

to him in their present condition to be impossible of attainment."

"Their 'present condition,' eh? What the deuce does he know about their 'present condition'? Sweating mathematics and digging into law-books—he's out of the country altogether."

"Yes; but, papa, he really does know a great deal about it. He has studied all sorts of questions—land-tenure, tenancy, rotation of crops, and political economy—you know."

"Thank Heaven, I don't know! Political economy, indeed! It was expressly invented for the benefit of the Radical party. It has nearly ruined England. What ground has political economy to interfere with a system which has existed for generations and has worked so well? Why, we have hitherto been congratulating ourselves in the country that we were exempt from the evils of that cursed town Unionism, and here, by—by Jove! it has broken out, of all places in the world, in my parish! Never mind, we'll scotch the snake."

"But after all in your heart, dear papa, don't you think there is something to be said for it? I don't profess to know, but Henry says—"

"I don't want to know what Henry says. The case is inarguable. In fact, I'll tell you what, my dear, if Henry Ewbank comes here instructing

you in Radical and revolutionary principles,
I'll——”

“Hush!” cried Emily, putting her hand on his mouth.

“——Horsewhip him!” said the Squire, when he could draw away the pretty teasing fingers.

Whereat Emily laughed, and then the Squire laughed; and so the disagreeable subject went by. Emily had received a letter by the afternoon post announcing her lover's arrival on the next day from the Circuit town, but just then she discreetly said nothing about it.

CHAPTER III.

THE MUSHROOM HAT ON ITS DEFENCE.

MR. LEICESTER went heartily with the Squire and the neighbouring gentry. His associations, instincts and education made this natural. Though he would on behalf of the Church Missionary Society have preached with fervour from the text "*God—hath made of one blood all nations of men,*" he could not help making, in feeling and in practice, an insensible exception from this doctrine in favour of the English aristocracy. His sympathies would have gone *down* to the labourers in many acts of kindness: they never went *out* to them on the level of human and Christian brotherhood. How different is the benevolence of patronage from the fraternity of genuine charity!

The Vicar thought it his duty to preach a sermon to his parishioners on the topic—" *And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.*" It rather missed its aim, since those for whom it was meant were scantily represented in the free seats, but it

pleased the squirearchy and the farmers who formed the congregation. They found their own ideas expressed in good English, and backed up by the authority of the Church. But there was one fly in the ointment—that was the Curate. His conduct at the meeting had much outraged the tender sensibilities of the Hankerley farmers, and became the subject of remark from Mr. Byrton to his friend. What was to become of the country, what was to become of society, what was to become of *them*, if the revolutionary projects of socialists were to be defended or even winked at by the clergy? Outside the parish there were two opinions about Mr. Linkboy's conduct. Some of the clerical newspapers employed the choicest epithets to characterise his interference; others of his own colour seemed inclined to vindicate him. In the journals of heretic Radicalism however the High Church Curate for once received applause. Mr. Leicester determined to reprehend the young man's boldness.

“ My dear sir,” he argued, “ there are many points about which you and I are very seriously at variance, but which I am content to overlook because of my general approval of your zeal and sincerity. So long as these are mere matters of conscience, and do not bring the Church into collision with the

society that surrounds it, I can afford to overlook them. But if you step beyond this to interfere in a purely social contention, or throw the influence you have as a minister of the Church into one scale or the other, you exceed your duty and place both yourself and me in a very embarrassing position."

"I am sorry, sir," replied Mr. Linkboy, "to hear you seem to admit that the office of peacemaker is departed from Christ's ministry. Has the time gone by when we shall be called the *children of God*? The people who have been complaining of me must be infatuated bigots on their side of the question, for I did not interfere in favour of either party. I interposed when there was danger of a collision. I believe your own generous spirit would have led you to do the same if you had been there."

The Vicar winced. He was the very man to have done what he felt himself now obliged to condemn. For that reason he was harder on the fault. He began—

"We have nothing to do with this matter—"

"Pardon me, sir," said the Curate, "I seriously dispute that. I think we have a clear duty in this matter. I have satisfied myself in many visits, not always accepted with the cordiality I should have wished, that the condition of these agricultural labourers is a shame to the land they live in."

“Yes, that is obvious to us all ; but I must take leave to say that undue sympathy is more sentimental than practical. The condition of the labourer is due to circumstances we can neither control nor affect. We can only mitigate it by charity and proper administration of the Poor-law. The age resents the interference of enthusiasts in affairs purely economic. Our mission as Christian ministers is not to redress civil and social wrongs by political action. We must be content to spread the leaven of the principles of Christ.”

“But not to show their practical application ? ” said Mr. Linkboy, warmly. “ Oh, sir, I cannot so read my duty. Conscience carries me beyond that.”

“I do not wish to fetter your liberty of conscience in any way, Mr. Linkboy,” replied the Vicar ; “ but I see so much danger in the kindly, though mistaken views you hold on this question, that I am really forced to speak very plainly, and to say that I cannot assent to your taking any further part in this serious quarrel. Great as is my regard for you, any further manifestation of the sympathies which I now see clearly you entertain must lead to consequences painful to both of us. You will place the Church in the false position of being opposed to the harmony of classes and the established order of things.”

“A false position, sir?” cried Mr. Linkboy, with indiscreet animation. “The Church and the world are natural antagonists. What if the harmony of classes be the still monotony of death, and the established order of things the mere permanence of oppression and wrong? The kingdom of peace came also not to bring peace but a sword—it has no truce with wrong, and sin, and evil-doing, and fraud.”

“My young friend,” said Mr. Leicester, sincerely, “let me caution you against generalities. They destroy many a man’s balance of mind and impair his usefulness. They are so plausible and often so inapplicable. Christ never came to set class against class.”

With this triumphant generality Mr. Leicester brought the interview to a close.

CHAPTER IV.

A NOAH'S DOVE.

WHEN, on the morning of Hodge's flight, Mary awoke, she wondered why her father had left his bed so early. Then, having looked out of the window and seen how far the sun had come up the eastern sky, she became frightened to find that she had overslept herself. After dressing two or three of the younger fry, leaving the rest to scramble into their clothes as best they could, she came downstairs with Little Hodge. The dispositions her father had made struck her with some surprise. She guessed from these that he had gone for the day. Not only that; this unusual attention and the small packet of money suggested the fear that his absence must have something to do with the conversation of last night; but she cheered herself with the thought that he might have gone somewhere to seek better wages or to get some assistance. The long day passed, while she swept, and scrubbed, and washed, and patched away, and out

of the money on the table Tummas was able to get the baby some good milk, so that the household was not so cast down with the loss of its head as might have been expected. In the afternoon Mrs. Nollekens came in with something in her hand for Little Hodge, ready to give an hour's assistance to Mary in reviewing the remnants of the children's clothing. Her verdict was decisive.

“Thay beant vit vor gipsies and bagabones, let aloan a decent vamily.”

“Fayther do zaay a kén't avoord to get we any muore. A do feel un tarrible. A went awaay avore daaylight athout his breakfast. Do ee thenk, Missus Nollekens, as he have no noshuns about hisself?”

Mrs. Nollekens on this information shrewdly cross-questioned Mary, and, though she kept it to herself, suspected the truth. She put it to her own mind that it was exactly the course that coward Tim Nollekens would have pursued. Her heart smote her, too, for the terrible suggestion she had made to Hodge flashed across her mind and made her uneasy. She stayed, however, as long as she could, combing out the hair of all the children with a vigour and conscientiousness that they never forgot, and left the whole family improved and brightened by her visit.

That night Mary remained up a long time after the others had gone to bed. Through the long, quiet gloaming of the fast-coming summer, far into the darkness, she sat listening for her father's step. He did not come. She carried the baby upstairs and lay awake on the bed. In the terrible, protracted silence it seemed as if she could hear a great pulse throbbing in her ears ; but no sound disturbed her, and by-and-by she fell asleep. In her uneasy dreams now and then she cried out, 'Fayther! Fayther!' but the darkness gave no answer. Morning came, and sunlight, and the opening of the balm-breathing lips of waking summer, but her eyes did not rest on the familiar form heavy with slumber.

So that day passed, and the next, and the next, and Mary and the neighbours became seriously alarmed. Nollekens turned round on his wife rather sharply.

"Ay! ee were too cruel to un! Do ee recklect how ee towld un to cut a's throat! Mebbe y'ave a gone and done it. Thee'l't have un laaid to thy chairge."

Mrs. Nollekens gave the best proof of her remorse by holding her tongue.

On the third day the news had spread that John Hodge had disappeared. Mr. Jolly made inquiries,

and sent for the relieving-officer. By this time Mary was in great distress. The scrap of paper now covered only a few halfpence, and the clothes problem had ceased to have some of its terms. On the fourth day the relieving-officer came and examined Mary. He was not consoled. Eleven children were thrown on the parish as clear as daylight. They were destitute of food and clothing, and must be taken into the workhouse. The Union Committee of the labourers however, scanty as were their funds, resolved to take charge of Mary and Little Hodge, and Mrs. Nollekens received them into her house. The rest were removed to the Union. Meantime a large placard was posted about the country offering a reward for John Hodge's apprehension. It was in characters large enough for the hue and cry after a murderer. There was Scripture text for treating the fugitive as worse than an infidel. Mr. Mee procured a warrant from a justice, no other than the Vicar of Hankerley, to arrest Hodge as 'a rogue and vagabond,' and this having been duly backed, a parish constable was sent off to other counties in search of him.

As for Hodge, his ideas in levanting had been very hazy. All earthly means failing him, I, who know of his narrow education and as narrow

experience, cannot condemn him for his distrust of Providence. Providence is a deity more preached about than believed in through the country districts, where, with ample spiritual teaching in theory, there is a great deal of practical infidelity. This poor man's appeal to Providence to bless him in the act of running away from his family was a curious display of the mistiness of his mind about the God he confessed: a notable commentary on the beautiful adaptability of an Established Church to the spiritual requirements of the age.

His immediate intentions in getting away were to make for a seaport town, whence he fondly imagined he could get translated to Canada. There was a tradition in Hankerley of a former Hankerley man who, emigrating to Canada, had made a fortune; and this local historic tale so strongly laying hold of the fancies of the unlettered people among whom it floated, was a proof of the power that might be brought to bear upon the imaginations of our rural communities were there an official class capable of apprehending its issues and willing to avail themselves of its aid. This then was the vague idea with which Hodge started. Two or three days' walking, with inquiries of the way to London—which he believed to be the nearest seaport town—brought him up with a grim

question : how was he to live till he got there ? Here and there kindly folk, answering the queries of the sad-looking man, gave him help along with information ; but every day seemed to make his course more hopeless. Reaching at length a county town, and passing wearily and hungrily along its main street, he might, among the wondrous sights he saw, have read on the police-board outside the town-hall the proclamation for his own arrest. But he could not read. As it was his attention was called to it by a familiar voice, while a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Philip Nokes, the constable at Hankerley, claimed him for his prisoner. Hodge was so beaten and broken-down that he never said a word, and went with the man like a child. Philip did not reproach him ; he only told him he was sorry he was obliged to take him back. And so in silence the two returned to Hankerley, where Hodge was secured in the lock-up.

CHAPTER V.

A UKASE ON BRITISH SOIL.

EMILY's lover arrived at Byrton Hall, to meet a welcome from old and young, excepting the Squire, who would at this juncture rather not have had the factious young Radical about him. Mr. Byrton felt himself nervous and irritable, and doubted his own ability to support even the presence of any one not sympathising with his views and designs.

He had caused his steward to issue a notice to the tenants and labourers on his estate declaring his hostility to the Union, and stating that he, as the feudal lord of the district, "felt a heavy responsibility with regard to the nature of the relations existing between the people on his estates." He had "observed with pain that the cordiality and goodwill which ought to exist between the labourers and his tenants was in danger of being broken by the interference of meddlesome agitators," whose hostility to the Throne, Church, and Constitution needed no proof. "Under (*sic*) these circumstances

I feel myself compelled to take such steps as shall tend to ensure to the farmer on the one hand immunity from the dangerous practices of improper combination, and the labourer on the other hand from the interested schemes of Communists, Internationalists, and agitators. With the view of securing these things, I have caused notices to be served on all those labourers who hold cottages or allotments directly from me that their joining the Union will lead to their eviction, and I invite such of my tenants as have control of the cottages on their farms to co-operate with me in enforcing this rule. In this way alone can be secured a supply of effective labour without ruin to the farmer, and without embarrassing the kindly relations that have always existed, by the introduction of principles subversive of social order and economy."

Young Ewbank read this paper with amazement and chagrin. It was not merely the bad English that he deprecated. He implored his prospective father-in-law to recall it, but received for his pains a sound rating. As his own father joined the Squire in his proceedings, an appeal to him was useless. He contented himself with visiting the cottagers, urging them to be moderate in their demands, to avoid the pitfalls of Unionism, and to adhere to their present programme. By this time

a large sum of money was in the hands of the Committee, and they were able to keep in tolerable comfort all those who were on strike. Moreover the Squire and his coadjutors were mortified to find that, angry as the farmers were, some were not disposed to ruin themselves for the sake of a principle, and that in a week or two they were beginning to pick up Union men at advanced wages to save their crops from disaster. You may appeal to men's selfishness to act with you up to the point at which they have a hope or a certainty of profiting by the co-operation ; but let a stronger appeal be made to the same point from another quarter, and they are likely to discard principles and leave you in the lurch.

CHAPTER VI.

JUSTICES' JUSTICE AND STATUTES AT LARGE.

HODGE was brought up at a Petty Sessions. The Justices were no other than the Vicar and the Squire. In rural life society interlocks and overlaps in an amazing way. One justice who is a brewer applies for the licences of his public-houses to brother justices, who may be connected with him by marriage or may regularly hunt the country with him. A tenant may prosecute a labourer before their common landlord. In the present instance two *ex-officio* Guardians were sitting as judges in a case wherein the Board of Guardians was interested. This was in strict accordance with an Act of Parliament. Hodge did not detect the anomaly. He had for all his life seen these gentlemen adjudicating on everything that concerned his class. If they had ordered him to be hanged he would scarcely have questioned their authority.

He stood up in the Court-room, a grimy man,

with his head bent, his eyes red and watery, his hair tossed, his features drawn together in exquisite pain—a pain to look at!—a crestfallen-looking knave enough. The Squire's respectable, healthy face looked like a rouged Sphynx, he had fixed his features in so hard a cast. Mr. Leicester's teeth no longer shone benignly towards his parishioner, but were shut in by indignant lips. The gentlemen thought that the man had been guilty of one of the most unmanly acts whereof an Englishman could be accused, and regarded him with as much sternness as they would have felt towards a poacher—and that is saying a good deal.

However, they spoke in gentle, quiet tones.

When Hodge looked round the Court his eye fell on Mrs. Nollekens and Mary, the latter carrying Little Ben in her arms. He averted his glance and bent down his head still deeper. He did not notice a young gentleman who sat near the dock, in a place devoted to legal personages, and who seemed very uneasy. Henry Ewbank was fidgeting about on his seat in a way that attracted the Squire's attention.

Mr. Mee and the relieving-officer appeared. They testified to the fact that the children had been found in a shocking state of destitution, almost without clothes, hungry as sparrows, and

apparently quite neglected. In the course of the somewhat desultory evidence given on these points the Squire asked the relieving-officer—

“Is it supposed that the prisoner drank?”

“Well, sir, he’ve generally had a good character for soberness, and I can’t say nothing agen him in that partikler.”

“Then what has he done with his money?”

O Truth! from the high just Heavens answer for him to British Justice, *What has he done with his money?*

“No one don’t know,” replied the functionary. “He don’t seem to have spent it all at home from the look of the place.”

Here a shrill small voice spoke out in incisive tones that startled the Court—

“Theer’t a liard, hossifer! Fayther ‘ave a given we every penny ee’ve a yearned aal along. Ee don’t yearn no muore’n nine shellin’ a-wik.”

“Ay! and ‘leven ov ‘em to taake keer on,” added Mrs. Nollekens, in a curious treble. “What do ee stand theer vor and taalk zuch nonsense as that theer to tha magistrates?”

“Silence in the Court!” cried the Clerk. Mr. Leicester gently reproved the interrupters.

“Is this his little girl?” asked the Vicar.

“Yes, sir.”

“Step forward.”

And Mary bearing Little Hodge, whose tiny face turned round amused as he fixed his eyes alternately on the Justices above him, came to the front, and being put on her mettle, she, between questions and confessions and comments of her own, told the story of Hodge’s life for the last three months, Hodge listening with his face in his hands. The Vicar’s features relaxed ; the Squire’s muscles refused any longer to affect the Sphynx.

“Fayther ain’t done nothin’ wrong, zur. Ee woodent a hurt a fly. Ee’ve a been awaay tryen to get muore work, zur. Doan’t ee go to punish un vor that, zur. It’s aal along o’ thease baby, zince mother died, zur. Let un off this time, zur.”

Mary and Little Hodge began a concert together too distracting to be borne, and she was led for awhile out of Court. Had the case ended here Hodge would have come off lightly. Put sensible men in a good humour, opposite some monstrous solecism in our laws, and they will find some way of defecating it. But the prisoner was asked by the Clerk whether he had anything to say in his defence. And then, the man being desperate, and his whole soul within him raging with combined remorse and sense of wrong, he burst out thus—

“What’ve I a got to zaay in my defence ?

Nawthin' ! I doan't keer to defend myzelf. Yo gentlemen a settin' theer've a knowed me aal my life, an' theer ain't a zoul alive ken zaay woone evil word about me avore this time. I've allus lived honest, an' I'd a meant to die honest, but yo'd nar a let me. I went to Varmer Jolly—ee's yeer and ken zaay zo—an' axed un vor tha waages I wer righteously a yearnin', but ee woodent harken to me. I went to yo, zur, an' *yo* woodent do nawthin' vor sich as me. 'Twer no use vor I to try to keep myzelf an' tha childern jest at starvashun-pint, wer it? I mid 'ave a meade out to muggle along if so be Mister Jolly 'd a rised my waages, or tha Yunion cood a kep' on taaken keer o' thease last poor little un, till sich time as I mid a married zum'un to keep tha childern tidy ; but I wer a staarven, gentlemen ! and if so be yo wer a staarven yo woodent know how to stop to thenk. 'Twer no good vor I to try to look aaster aal thay childern, an' do a daay's work in tha bargain, on tha wittles I've been a livin' on. I do zaay no man ken be vitly honest on tha waages we be a getten. Till sich time as tha Yunion 'ad a vuorced tha varmers to rise tha waages theer wern't nothing vor I but runnen awaay, zo vur as I zee."

"What! *You* are one of these Union men, then?" interposed the Squire.

"Ees, I be," replied the prisoner, sullenly.

"If you please, your honour, he is one of the originators of it," said Farmer Jolly, thus throwing in gratis a piece of unsworn evidence. Ewbank squirmed about on his seat most distractedly.

"I had not heard of this! Quite a dangerous character," said the Justice. The two constables in the Court, looking gravely at the broken-hearted Hodge, evinced an intelligent acquiescence in this dictum. "A dangerous character, indeed! Deserting his children, and a Unionist! (In an undertone.) Well, Mr. Clerk, I suppose the case is closed, eh? Guilty by his own confession. There is nothing more to be done but to pass sentence?"

The Clerk nodded. He had been looking up the law for the Justices, and now handed up the well-worn 'Burn's' to the gentlemen on the bench. A little colloquy ensued, in which the Clerk took part. Then the Squire cleared his throat. Young Mr. Ewbank's uneasiness increased. He half stood up and seemed about to speak, but he sat down again, and the Squire said—

"John Hodge, you have been brought before us charged with an offence happily rare in these parts. In an experience of five-and-thirty years as a Guardian and as a magistrate I have never met with a case in all its points so aggravated. I shall

not refer to the fact that, by your own admission you are associated with those unprincipled persons who are endeavouring to introduce into this district the nefarious and tyrannical system of Trade-unionism. On that I say nothing, except that it is an indication of your general disposition of which the Bench is bound to take notice. But you are charged on behalf of the Guardians of Coddleton Union with the specific offence of deserting your children. You, the father of eleven little ones, whom God had given you to nourish and cherish," said the Squire, with deep solemnity, " basely abandoned them, and, for all you knew, left them to perish ! "

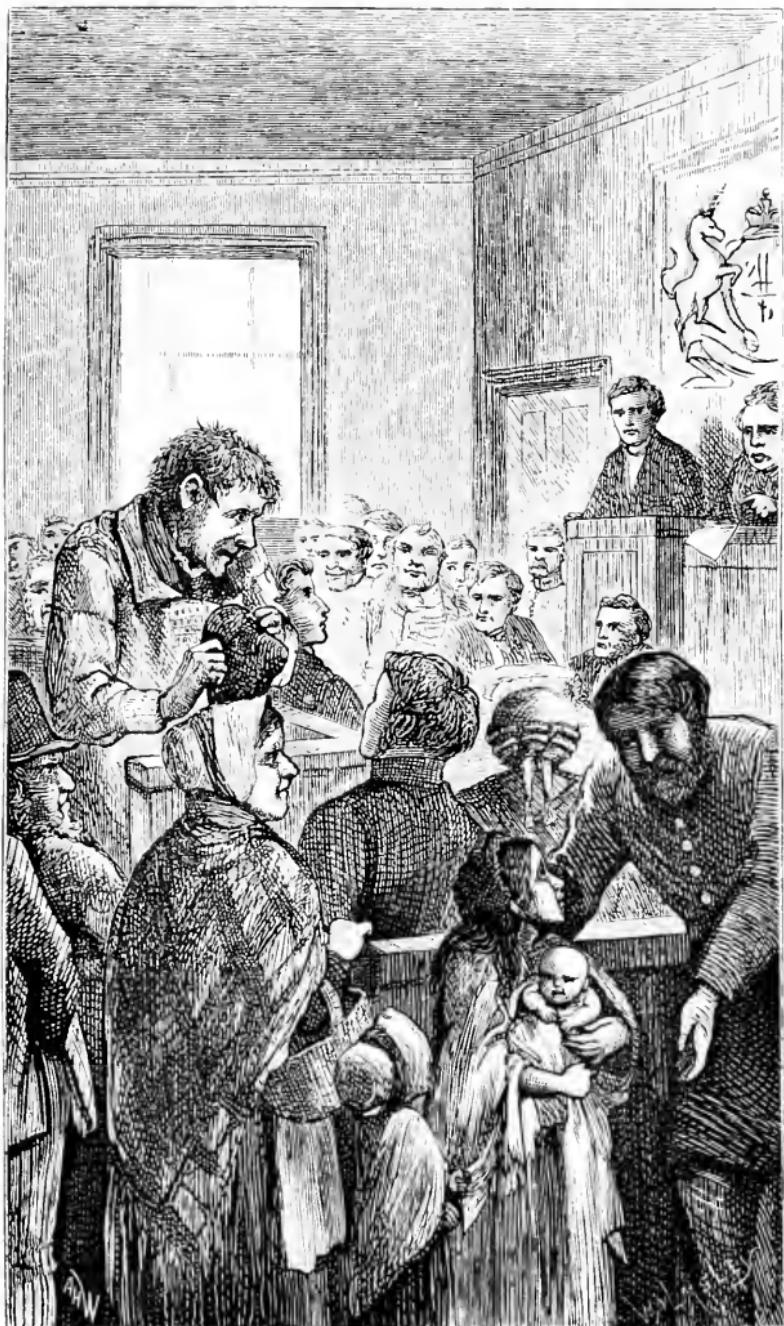
"Oh, naw, naw, naw!" cried little Mary from the door, in a shrill passion. "Ee never meant to do no harm to we ! "

"Remove that person from the Court," said the Justice ; and when the order had been executed, amidst some undertone comments of Mrs. Nol-lekens and wringing of hands of poor Hodge, the magistrate proceeded—

"Now the law is quite clear. You are charged before us to-day—and justly charged—as a rogue and vagabond——"

Hodge started, and fire kindled in his eyes.

"Yes, as a *rogue and vagabond*, and on due proof



AS "A ROGUE AND A VAGABOND." *[To face p. 144.]*



to be punished as such. Under the Vagrancy Act, 5th George the Fourth, chapter 83—‘*Every person running away and leaving his wife or his or her children chargeable, or whereby she or any of them shall become chargeable, to any parish, township, or place—shall be deemed a rogue and vagabond within the true intent and meaning of this Act.*’ This is a salutary provision nearly as old as the Poor-law itself, for by a much earlier Act it was enacted that ‘all such persons so running away should be taken and deemed to be incorrigible rogues, and endure the pain of incorrigible rogues.’ Your offence has been aggravated by the nature of your defence.”

The Justice was here interrupted by the entrance of a man whose appearance created some sensation in the Court. It was Sammy Stedman ; and Henry Ewbank beckoning him to his side engaged in an eager conversation with him.

“—You have defended your course,” proceeded the Justice, “by statements both untrue and intolerable, and this has led us to consider it our duty to make an example of you. Your sentence is that you be committed to the House of Correction, there to be kept at hard labour for the space of six weeks.”

“O good Godamitey !” said Mrs. Nollekens, in

searching tones. “You’ll zuffer vor this! An’ yo, a passon, a sitten by and taaken paart wi’ un! Zure as theer be a God above——” Her eloquence was dexterously stifled by the big hand of a constable, and she was carried out of Court in an attitude of vigorous protest.

It was then that Sammy Stedman stood up beside young Ewbank and said, bluntly—

“Hold, gentlemen! I understand this whole affair is illegal. You have no jurisdiction!”

“Sit down, sir! What right have you to address the Bench?”

“The right of any honest Englishman, your honour, who sees an injustice about to be perpetrated,” said young Ewbank, unable to restrain himself any longer. “The man is right, sir. The Court can have no jurisdiction by the principles of Magna Charta, because the Justices are parties to the prosecution.”

The Squire was livid. He made a tremendous effort to command himself, and failed.

“Henry, are you mad?” he shouted. “Sit down, sir! I—I—eh? What?”—to the Clerk. The latter had risen to whisper to him.

“Sentence has been pronounced,” said the Clerk. “The jurisdiction is statutory, Mr. Ewbank. Remove the prisoner!”

The young barrister had fallen into a serious error. His zeal entirely overran his discretion and exceeded his knowledge. His principles were better than his law. No wonder. He might well have believed that English law would not have been disgraced by so monstrous an anomaly: he could only credit, when examination had proved it, that on the contrary it was expressly enacted. Outside of London there can be no case in which the Guardians are concerned wherein the Justices themselves, who are all *ex-officio* Guardians, are not parties; and if it be supposed that, as Guardian and Judge, the Justice is equally disinterested, one needs only to study the above instance to convince him that a person who has already decided on a case in a less responsible and more informal tribunal, is not a fit person to try the same question where it affects the liberty of one of Her Majesty's lieges.



PART IV.



THE CLIMAX OF DISUNION.

CHAPTER I.

A WELCOME HOME.

ROUND and round went the treadmill with diurnal regularity, and up and down upon its urgent steps the prisoner at fixed intervals pursued his Sisypheian task. Round and round turned the great wheel of Time, and up and down went the weary feet of Poverty upon the relentless boards as they came up to the tread, until the whole head grew dizzy and the whole heart faint, and even the Angel of Hope, last of heavenly things to be lost to the eye of Despair, was blinded from sight. Round and round went the great mill of Labour, and behold, strong and earnest, weak and wicked ones trod it side by side, ever moving but never upwards, striving sometimes to stay the fatal motion or to cast themselves down from their bewildering toil, but ever finding their feet drawn down by the magnets of Necessity and forced to plod on again in a monotonous mimicry of ascent. Round, too, went the wheel of human Hope, carry-

ing on its circle a few happy yeomen earnest in their work, who mounted painfully but surely, step by step, towards higher and better things. Round rolled the year, bearing with it to its close the aging, tiring hearts, minds and bodies of the great world, with all their aggregating griefs ; and as its hours came and went, there was poor Emily Byrton, weeping her lover—no longer admitted to be hers, forbidden the threshold he used so cheerily to cross—counting the hours with palpitating heart and secret tears, or bravely struggling to master a grief that would not be comforted. For the day when Henry Ewbank chose to give way to his generous but inconsiderate impulse, he had received from a servant as he left the court a hastily-written note in the Squire's hand. It warned him that he had irremediably forfeited Mr. Byrton's confidence. It interdicted any further intercourse with his daughter—‘a decision which I communicate to the son of my oldest and warmest friend with deep pain, but from a clear sense of duty. Your sympathies have run away with your judgment. Your law was as bad as your act, and you have made a fool of yourself.’ Young men of precocious abilities and natural generosity should be cautious now-a-days to carry themselves with extreme restraint. ’Tis unsafe to be too candid in political thought. Pre-



"BREAKING AWAY."

[To face p. 152.

mature disclosure of ideas and sympathies, however right, may ruin a man long before the time has come when it is safe to avow them, yet he may live to see others rise upon the advocacy of opinions that blasted his success. Ewbank was too honourable to take advantage of Emily's devotion to him. He bore the separation like a man, and gave himself up with renewed energy to the practice of his profession.

Round and round went the mill in the House of Correction, and round rolled the great wheel of Time. We will not follow John Hodge over those painful steps. . . . Indeed, the shame weighed him down more than anything else. Meanwhile Little Hodge and Mary thrived under Mrs. Nollekens's care. It was cleverly managed by the authorities that Hodge's release from the House of Correction should concur with the return of his family from the workhouse. When he had, with shamefaced looks, trudged home, he met the deputy and nine of his children at the door of his cottage. I wish I could describe the meeting. The officer was not unkind. He had brought the key of the cottage and some food. He said, however—

“It's now your meet and right and bounding duty to take keer of these young uns, Master, and

don't ee go to evade it. You'll be watched pretty close now, I tell ee, so don't ee go fur to run away again."

Hodge answered not. He looked dreamily at his children, who set up a loud and bitter cry. It scared the relieving-officer away.

The decision of the Justices had been so consistent with the general course of English law as to be the least utilitarian and most expensive result that could have been effected. It cost the country near upon two hundred pounds, which, at Hodge's rate of wages, would have maintained him and his family in luxury for about four years: two statements not necessarily related to each other, but worth making.

CHAPTER II.

THE AGONIES OF SOLUTION.

THE eyes of the country were now fixed upon the struggle going on in the district of Coddleton. An old system was on its trial ; and in truth, it had been rudely shaken. The State-in-which-it-has-pleased-Providence-to-place-you theory, which had for generations determined the circumstances of life for their forefathers and fathers, and was still the gospel of clergy and squires, was found to be no longer applicable to the case of Hodge and Little Hodge, and the Hodges to come. That parental or patronal relation in agriculture, 'so unlike all other relations of master and labourer, and therefore not lightly to be interfered with,' seemed to be in danger, and not to be the eternal institution a fond bucolic faith had pictured it. Commercial principles were pushing their way into this rustic, romantic, half-domestic community. Hinds were asserting the right of combination. Political economy had broken loose from the

wicked towns and was wildly careering about the innocent country. Meantime the Labourers' Union pursued its way with varying success. Large subscriptions after a time enabled the infant Union to establish itself on a strong financial basis, and this peculiarity in its formation gave it additional power in its first passes with the employers. It met their refusals by withdrawing men and sending them to the North of England or deporting them to Canada and New Zealand. But for the simplicity and honesty of the leaders, these funds might have been a source of danger; but they were administered as if the men had subscribed them, and the surplus was carefully invested. Every effort was made to induce the members to keep up their subscriptions through the summer, Sammy Stedman urging upon them the duty of thrift and self-restraint in preparation for the winter. He had anticipated that then the farmers would find some practical mode of revenge. Thus was brought home to many men who had never thought of it before, the practice of economy; while there was set before them a worthy reason and object in its exercise. The value of this lesson was long afterwards evinced in a variety of ways.

As harvest came on the lock-out collapsed. No labourers, as we have seen, would come in from

any other part of the country. An attempt to import Irishmen failed. China and India were not convenient enough to supply harvest-men to outwitted capitalists. No government would have dared to intervene in the dispute by supplying soldiers to do the work. The farmers could only come to terms. Wages went up, the men went in. There was coolness. There were muttered threats about 'biding the time,' but for the present not a man was evicted. During the harvest the farmers admitted that their work had never been better done. They found that the increased pay had wrought some magnetic change on the hobbledehoy of last year. Sammy Stedman used Hodge's case with great art. Hodge was represented as the first martyr of agricultural union. Little Hodge became a proverbial emblem of the labourer's need and helplessness. The Rev. Baptist Bunyan preached upon that tiny mortal from the text, "O Lord, how long?" immediately exclaiming, "Twenty-two inches and not weighing seventeen pounds." Mr. Leicester and Mr. Byrton were terribly scathed by Radical journals. The Tory papers eulogised them for the mettle they had shown in an age when it was fashionable to truckle to the democracy.

The Union meanwhile had adopted rules to

regulate strikes which, had the employers taken the trouble to read them, ought to have quieted their alarm. Violence was forbidden. No strike was to take place without a month's clear notice; and, that there might be no temptation to take unfair advantage of the necessities of harvest time, they settled that in the absence of notice or a special agreement, the rate of wages ruling at the outset of harvest was to hold good throughout. The number of hours of a day's work was fixed, and overtime was to be paid extra. No rules were adopted to restrict the number of apprentices or to limit the division of labour. The most arbitrary provision was that forbidding the employment of women in field-work—a rule dictated by a healthy sentiment, but certainly not consistent with personal freedom.¹ On the whole, the association when calmly examined was simply a fair and not injudicious combination to win the labourer a standing-ground on a level with the wage-payer. But landlords, farmers and priests chose to ignore all these elements of good, and clothed the innocent Union with all the terrors of Jacquerie. They fought a myth that did not exist, and themselves raised issues the others had never thought of. It was alleged that the Union would become a political institution; and, indeed, no act tending to

convert it into one was foregone by its opponents. The Church was said to be endangered by the excitement among the yokels ; and in the result the yokels began to consider what that meant, and to accept the issue. The land question was averred by terrified peers and squires to be at the bottom of the agitation ; and, of course, the fears of these persons suggested to real agitators a new article in their programme. Thus the obstinacy, folly and prejudice of one side excited the passions and avidities of the other.

Coddleton forthwith absorbed a great part of the amateur and professional managers of political reforms. The puzzled rustics were assailed by emigration agents : they were told that their emancipation would depend on woman-suffrage : they learned that unless the Outrageous Distempers Acts were repealed the regeneration of the agricultural labourer was a matter of uncertainty : they listened to abstract essays or crude diatribes against the tenure of land by any private individual whatever, and dimly imagined how matters would be when it was all administered for their good by an impersonal power named the State : or they were assured that the improvement of their condition was intimately connected with the downfall of the Church. Indeed there was no 'movement,'

with or without the machinery of a league, of which representatives did not rush into Coddleton to saddle its principles on the coming Union. Much as there was of the grotesque in this, it was natural. These people had been shut out of the world and its policies ; now they were like Joash the king—an infant brought out of hiding to take his part at ruling, and suddenly called upon to exercise judgment upon unknown conditions. If one were inclined to blame some of the busybodies who did not remember that there was a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing reforms, as well as lovers, it should not be overlooked how much of this was, as we have seen, provoked and prompted by the policy adopted on the other side. A manly, candid, generous treatment of the Coddleton Unionists might have restrained both parties from unnatural hostilities, and have prolonged the safety of institutions which afterwards trembled in the balance. But old institutions on their defence are often as blind as Jacob, without the same method in their blindness.

Interveners were not wanting on the other side. It also had its agitators ; but as they came in the guise of Peers and Ecclesiastics, of Baronets and Members of Parliament, their whimsies on the part of ‘law and order’ were reported in the news-

papers and approved by the organs of the Philistines. The cleverest pencil in England, often so nobly employed, basely lent itself in the interest of property to caricature in the grossest manner the advocates of weakness against injustice—and humanity against selfishness. Whatever represented privilege, property, land, ranged itself against the Coddleton Unionists and their friends. The Bench of Bishops, before whom—as vice-regents in the Church on behalf of her Majesty and its other Head in Heaven—all men were of equal standing, afforded a few specimens of hierarchs too farsighted and too philosophical to hail with sympathy an effort for the development of better earthly conditions, of truer freedom, and (more serious matter!) of greater power, in a class hitherto looked upon as the Heaven-ordained slaves of property and the least troublesome numerical units of a State Church. God forbid we should reprehend these ecclesiastics unduly or assail them with malice. Fortunately they did not wholly represent their Church. They chose their own point of Church defence, and manifested, no doubt, an honest idea of the Church's position and duty. If any one or all of them prefer to show the Church banded with property against poverty, with land against labour, with Manchester economy against

social science, with ecclesiastical privilege against free thought, surely they have counted the cost and are willing to endure all things—even the formulation of their views by an alien from their commonwealth. As vicars of Christ they must be accredited with sincerity of heart and purity from the taint of flesh. If to a spectator there seem to be something ironical in their situation, it is of their own choice, and they are voluntary martyrs to the satire of facts.

Mr. Byrton was so honestly impressed with the idea that the labourers were being misled by interested revolutionaries, that his activity in promoting the diffusion of correct principles of economy, and of proper ideas of the relations of classes, was unceasing. A Bishop was invited to stay at Byrton Hall, and lectured the men of Hankerley on the providential dispensation of labour and the superiority of good-feeling over the selfishness of good wages. His reflections on the danger of agitation were crude and harsh. Were I to report what he said it would not be believed. He was sorry for it afterwards, but was too infallible to say so.

A Peer, celebrated for his abilities, deemed it to be his duty to speak upon the question. He remarked that as the labourers had formed a Union, it was impossible to overlook the fact. He there-

fore urged the farmers to take cognisance of it. He pointed out that there was nothing illegal in combination, even though it were promoted by 'agitators,'—but he thought these ought to be scotched. He also laid down the principle that men were entitled to remuneration for their labour, and therefore ought to have it. He said that if they asked too much they could not get it. On the other hand, if the employer offered too little he could not have the labour. "Therefore," he said, "you see clearly that there are inevitable principles regulating these questions, and they must be recognised and acted upon. No other solution is possible." *Etcetera.* The farmers were puzzled to apprehend the simplicity of this solution, but they cheered the Peer because he had a reputation for common-sense.

The only other person one need mention is Sir Walter Waggington, Bart., M.P., who had ulterior views not easily justified, and somewhat undefined, even to himself. There never was so kind a man who aspired to statesmanship. His face was the prow of a radiant and smooth-sliding State-gondola. He had been a Tory minister: he was now a social reformer. No man was so eager to reconcile the irreconcilable and to win a Conservative success on Socialistic principles. He was in favour

of restricted revolution. He talked enough Communism to have hanged a Communist. He had discovered that the age was progressive : he desired that it should progress and Toryism triumph. He ascertained that the working-man had hopes : he tried to foster them—they lent sunshine to a dreary life. In his view every labourer should have a cottage, some land and a cow. He objected to the man's claiming it, or conspiring to get it, or trying to force it from a reluctant class, or obtaining it by modifications of the law or by purchase ; he desired to give it to him by Act of Parliament, if it could be done without interfering with the existing status. True, the only solution on that condition was the reclamation of the North Sea, but he did not say so. Sufficient unto the day was the discovery thereof. The amount of sympathy that the genial features and timid socialism of Sir Walter Waggington drew from 'Constitutional working-men' was marvellous. If cruel criticasters in political economy or rude and incredulous Radicals among the lower orders laughed good-naturedly at his vagaries, it was not strange. The world was not worthy of him. It would have been more worthy had it recognised his claims to leadership and made him the head of a Ministry. But it would not. Meantime, even in adversity, he was

the manly, good-hearted gentleman. He said in his vague, plethoric, and involuted style to the Hankerley labourers :—

“ My friends, happiness does not depend upon wealth. Happiness depends on something far higher—upon a thankful spirit, a contented mind. The poor man possessed of these attributes has within him elements of happiness which the rich man is entirely destitute of, provided he does not properly discharge the duties of his station. In my belief (and I am by no means apt to exaggerate, and will not ask you to overrate the blessings you enjoy) the labourers have no occasion to be led by any union, or to be led astray by discontented agitators. I apprehend that what they mainly stand in want of throughout the country are three things, namely, better education, better houses, and better food. If these requirements were looked to, legislated for, and promoted, the labourers would cease to be the dupes of those who fostered a spirit of discontent, and would lead far better and nobler lives.”

All this the labourers enthusiastically applauded. And this was all they got from their patronising friends. The Peer and the Bishop and the Baronet preached contentment, or cursed agitation, and went their way. That rugged old Free-Church-

man, Republican and Communist, the Apostle James, measured with cruel accuracy the] tether of such philanthropy as this: *If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace; be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*

CHAPTER III.

AN ANTIDOTE TO PROSELYTISM.

FARMER JOLLY could not afford to do without any of his men, and consequently for a few weeks there was plenty in the house of Hodge. His wages of sixteen shillings a-week enabled him to get Little Hodge looked after, and set Mary free for the gleaning. Hodge became a member of the Union Committee, wherein he developed an unexpected amount of good-sense and shrewdness. Each parish, indeed, had its little branch. There, for the first time, many a village hind learned the art of Public-business—an art in its dissemination so precious to Englishmen—so essential to the safety of the State.

Mr. Jolly had a favourite ploughman, to whom he gave sixteen shillings a-week, and who had hitherto proved deaf to the blandishments of the Unionists. He was a man, however, and had felt some sympathy for Hodge ; and though with country cunning he took care not to divulge his

opinions to his master, he very much approved of the Union movement. When Richard Roe saw that the result of the combination had been to raise the wages of inferior men nearly up to the level of his own, and found that Farmer Jolly seemed in no hurry to re-establish the former proportion, his soul was vexed within him. He asked himself what he had gained by cutting loose from his fellows ? He had been told that the Union rule would be a uniform rate of wages, but he found that Hodge and others were receiving two or three shillings more than less capable men—in fact, that the Union had driven the farmers not only to a general rise of wages, but, as a result of that, to adopt the principle of natural selection, and to pay better labourers higher wages. So Richard Roe went over in the dusk of a September evening to confer with Hodge upon the thoughts that burned within his brain. It is not the conversation but the result with which we have to do. Roe had finally decided to join the Union, and was leaving the house, when he saw the burly form of Farmer Jolly getting over the stile from the road and coming up the footpath that led past Hodge's cottage to the farm-house. The farmer had been at the monthly dinner of the Hankerley Agricultural Club, and was not only primed with fresh

wrath against Unionists but with bad wine. His quick eye lighted on the familiar form of his ploughman stealing away in the gloaming from Hodge's house.

"Hallo! D—n it, is that you, Dick, coming from that d—d Unionist's house?"

"Aye, zur, it be I."

Jolly ran forward and seized him by the throat. The gentleman was drunk and in a frenzy. Roe was a powerful man and was not drunk. The farmer's hand was a rude one.

"B'ee goen to jine th' Union?" said Jolly, white with passion and falling into the vernacular, as he always did when he forgot himself.

The fire was beginning to flash in Richard Roe's eyes, and his hands began to twitch with a terrible nervousness.

"Leäve go o' I!" he shouted, half-throttled.

"Yo be d—d! B'ee goen to jine th' Union?"

"Ees I be," said Richard Roe; and drawing back his hand he drove it into the face of the drunken man, who went down like a falling tree.

John Hodge could just discern this incident from his doorway, and in the stillness of the night heard every word. He saw Richard Roe, after a glance at his prostrate master, walk away, and then he saw Jolly sit up and wipe something from his face

with his handkerchief, at the same time cursing his ploughman and Hodge with great vigour. He ran forward and assisted him to rise. The farmer allowed him to do it; but, as he turned towards home, he muttered, in almost unutterable rage—

“Curse you! I’ll pay you for this.”

CHAPTER IV.

ARGUMENTUM AD HOMINEM.

THE next morning, while most of the men were engaged in the stackyard, Hodge, with a team and a boy, was ploughing one of the far fields. He had watched the sun from seven o'clock, and still with patient alternation he drove his bright share through the fallow in regular lines up and down the great field. At about ten o'clock he saw the familiar grey horse of his master, and with some surprise recognised on its back his master's form. He watched his approach not without trepidation. There was something sinister in the air with which Farmer Jolly directed the grey across the furrows, looking not to right or left, and making straight for the place where Hodge was ploughing.

“Stop!” shouted the farmer.

Hodge drew the lines and took off his felt. In his hand he held the plough-whip, with its heavy handle loaded with massive rings of brass, and its brass cap at the end—a terrible weapon in strong hands.

As he rode up Jolly snatched the whip from the clown's grasp. It was an old one, and the lash had worn short.

"Hold my horse," said he to the lad.

Hodge saw in his master's face a frightful resolution. There also, just below the right eye, was a slight gash in a setting of swollen black-and-blue that told of the severity of Richard Roe's fist.

"Now, you d—d coward, I'll show you how to push the Union on my farm."

Down on the man's shoulder, just missing his bare head, went the first blow; down on the soil he was tilling went John Hodge. The farmer had clubbed the whip, and now up and down it rose and fell on the shrieking, prostrate form, on shoulders, sides, back, arms and legs, with all the strength of a powerful man and all the weight of that loaded weapon. The boy, in an agony of fear, let go the horse and ran away. Up and down some sixty or seventy times went the strong arm and the loaded whip, till the arm was weary and he who wielded it had lost his breath. Then and only then he stayed. As he staggered along the field towards his horse, the groans of the beaten thing he had left behind him went up to Heaven.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCALES OF JUSTICE.

IT was Sally Nollekens on whom Hodge's eyes first opened when he recovered from the syncope into which he fell soon after the farmer had left him. There too were Nollekens, and Richard Roe, and our friend the doctor of the other Union. He detested the new Union, but he had a heart; so that, as he examined John Hodge, his blood coursed through his veins in boiling indignation. Sixty-six definite stripes and blows. Here on the back——no, I will not describe it: the man had been worse treated than that deserving ruffian whose punishment, gauged by a surgeon and applied with scientific skill, has excited the compassion of amiable sensibility. Read the accounts specially provided for public edification in the *Electric Meteor*, and add to them blood, and wounds, and clothing driven into the skin, and be curious to know no more. It was a fortnight before Hodge could walk.

The horror and detestation created by this incident were a credit to English society. Mr. Leicester several times called to see the patient. The Squire sent regularly to know how he was getting on, and the messenger did not go empty-handed. Emily Byrton, with a woman's delight at an opportunity of freely showing a forbidden sympathy, would be found in Hodge's chimney-corner, nursing that deliciously small baby, or reading an entertaining book to its father. And (shall I tell it?) there one day, quite unexpectedly, and so very, very awkwardly! came in Henry Ewbank, full of generous wrath, determined to see for himself how far bucolic rage had dared to go. It was so annoying to both the young people! and so embarrassing! and what was worse, that stupid invalid forthwith turned round and went to sleep. And, half-an-hour after, Emily Byrton is breaking through the doorway of the cottage from some restraining arms, and, with flushed face and sparkling eyes, half running from temptation. Well might the Squire that evening wonder what had brought back the fresh colour into the face which had been latterly paling and fading before his eyes, and disturbing his self-confidence.

The farmers and squires repudiated Jolly's conduct, while they said they had no doubt Hodge

deserved all he got. Slave-owners in America were wont to repudiate the 'occasional' acts of barbarity which distinguished that institution. The farmer was most blamed by his friends for having done a stupid act which compromised their cause. I can credit very few of *them* with sympathy for the flesh and blood that had suffered so fearfully. A hundred of them would have done the same thing had they dared. The humanity of men is generally worth little if you throw their purses in the other scale.

Jolly's lawyers endeavoured on his behalf to settle the case. His wife did her best to make up to Hodge for the outrage committed upon him by her husband. Hodge was besieged to accept a sum of money for his broken skin and lost time. Great as was the temptation, however, he resisted it. My man was no hero. I believe he would have taken the money had not Sammy Stedman and Henry Ewbank buckled him up, and but that the Unionists agreed to make it good to him. The end of the matter was instructive to the student of English life, society and law. The case came on at a Petty Sessions. Mr. Leicester stayed away. The Squire attended. Two other landlords were on the bench. Henry Ewbank, retained by the Union solicitor brought from London, since no

attorney in the neighbourhood would take the case, appeared for the complainant. Farmer Jolly needed no counsel. It was sought to get the respondent committed for ‘unlawful wounding,’ an offence that would have taken his case to the Assizes, and might have procured him one or two years’ penal servitude. The Bench, however, deciding that Mr. Jolly’s intention had been merely to give a beating with a whip, and not to injure the man, and consequently that it was a case of common assault, in which they had summary jurisdiction, fined Mr. Jolly in the full penalty of FIVE POUNDS.

On the same day, in the same court, before the same Justices, was heard the case of *The Queen v. Roc*, in which Hodge was called as a witness. Richard Roc stood on his defence for that he, being a serf, had violently beaten and assaulted his master. It was considered an aggravation of his offence that he alleged and proved his master’s drunkenness—a reason, so the Bench held, why he ought to have respected Jolly’s weakness. He was sentenced to a fortnight’s imprisonment without the option of a fine. The Bench declared that it was necessary for the public safety to put down the mutinous spirit arising among the labourers in the county.

O Heaven ! where meek-eyed, pure-eyed, holy Justice sits enthroned, looking down on these sad travesties of her administration, remember and pity our imbecile humanity, and lay not these things to our charge !

CHAPTER VI.

ALARUMS.—EXCURSIONS.

THE harvest was now over. The great stacks of corn, and oats, and hay loomed up in fields or barnyards, noble in their proportions, and glad-some to the farmers' eyes. The click and burr of the threshing-machines or the thud of the flail on the threshing-floor sounded in every part of the district. Then the early frosts began to nip the vegetation. Then began the clothing of the October trees to blow and scatter about, and the changing rags hung brown and shrivelled, till the cruel winterly winds tore them from the limbs and sprays, and sent them in mottled clouds driving through the gaunt woods or stripped copses—now whirling over lawns and meadows, now cosily loitering awhile in great heaps wherever the whimsical wind would let them rest; till by-and-by it would change its mind and come roaring round from some new quarter, and, blowing straight into the sequestered nooks, scatter the brown feathers all

over the face of the land. So forward towards November, with alternate days of cold clear sunshine and of dismal storm, dark fog-riden nights, angry winds, and the vicious frosts that heralded the chilling, killing time to come. Ah ! then it was that Poverty and Labour, huddled together, sat shuddering to think that the warm, blessed Summer was at an end, as they looked out on bleak heavens and a bleaker earth, vainly searching in the cloud-curtained sky for one gleam of the star of hope !

It was then that the farmers began to draw their lips together, and, counting how much the rise in wages had cost them, felt inclined to give play to the resentment they had so long been forced to suppress. The Squire's policy was adopted. Evictions were frequent, sometimes cruel ; but they were for some time met with decisive action on the part of the Union. The evicted were at once drafted off to other places—many to the Colonies. These were some of the best men in the district, and they never returned. 'If you must have more wages,' the farmers said, 'we cannot pay them all the year round. We shall do without as many as we can through the winter. We shall keep the best of you, and take the others only when we want them.' This was a bad look-out for the rest, but it was a natural policy and could not be gainsayed. Others

talked of turning their farms to grass, whereby, as they alleged, they should be able to manage with fewer hands ; but, since the alternative was the purchase of stock to grow on the grass, the change required a good deal of capital. This made the general application of the remedy for the present impossible. Farmer Jolly, after what had happened, was ashamed to turn out Hodge. But he strongly approved of the evictions. Poor Mr. Truscott felt more angry than his neighbours, because in face of the rise of wages bankruptcy was inevitable. That such a result must often ensue from many movements wherein the interests of men clash—wherin some superior advantage of one class or clique over another is in the course of redress, is very clear ; but would it not be poor wisdom to argue on such an account that a great, beneficent operation should be foregone in behalf of the few weak and unfortunate ones whom it must destroy ? Those who urged that they could not afford to pay the rate of wages demanded by the Unionists, or that they would be ruined by the increased cost of labour, were simply putting in an *ad misericordiam* plea for labour below the market price. 'Twould be as reasonable to ask the Bank of England not to raise its rate of discount because weak speculators and struggling merchants

were likely to be ruined by it. The bucolic economists who referred in defence of low wages to the all-powerful influence of the law of supply and demand, could with little consistency contend that the law must be made subservient to the capacity of some men, or a class of men, to carry on remunerative agriculture at anything but a low standard of wages : any more than merchants should protest against high rates of discount because they rendered profits precarious.

However, right or wrong in their political economy, the farmers were agreed in their determination to fight the Labourers' Union. But in their present tactics some of their allies deserted them. The Church would lend itself to the defence of privilege, but not to cruelty and oppression. The Vicar of Hankerley had of late been seriously debating with himself his line of conduct on this social question. Mr. Linkboy, watching his opportunities, often mentioned facts coming to his notice, which made the Vicar uneasy about the justice of the side he had so ardently espoused. He grew very cool in his sympathy with the Squire, who, having sacrificed a son-in-law to his prejudices, was bound to be stubbornly vindictive. When Farmer Jolly committed the outrage on poor Hodge Mr. Leicester's generous manliness burst

out. He boldly went to Jolly's house, and reproved him with a vigour so earnest and terrible that the farmer trembled. Coming from the parson's suave and gentle lips, the words were like knives. Jolly was cowed by them, though he was not cured. Moreover, Mr. Leicester went so far as to express opinions not complimentary of the judicial finding in the Hodge and Roe cases. The Squire and he would have fallen out if such old friends could have quarrelled.

CHAPTER VII.

A VISITOR.

ONE afternoon the Vicar and his Curate were engaged in the Vicarage parlour on some matters connected with the Church, when their attention was drawn to the window by the sound of wheels. A gig, familiar at the Coddleton station, some seven miles off, was coming up the drive, carrying besides the driver a person who would have attracted remark equally at Ujiji and on the boulevards at Paris. His extreme length—a better mode of characterising his appearance than to speak of his height—was not modified by any proportionate stoutness. Nevertheless, the spectator was left to guess as to the real anatomy of the man, and a clear judgment thereon was much confounded, from the fact that his clothes seemed to have been constructed to fit a body of prodigious bulk; whence one was apt to conjecture that the visitor came of a gigantic stock, whose garments he wore, though he was himself but an imperfectly

developed specimen. His brown face was cracked and wrinkled like a raised map of Switzerland, the cracks and wrinkles looking as rigid as a plaster cast until some inner secret convulsion set the whole in motion, when the play of electric expression all over his curious fretwork of features was a sight ever to be remembered. From a very large head fell in long, straight locks a quantity of greyish hair, and an Imperial of the same shade tipped the lower end of his protracted face. His eyes, quick, searching, restless as those of a hawk, played in the great cavities that lay between the heavy grey eye-brows and the high cheek-bones, with startling and magnetic power.

This gentleman, we should mention, had been whiling away the time in a conversation with the driver, who remarked that as they went along his fare took frequent notes. He also observed with surprise that the gentleman seemed intimate with the locality, though he was sure 'twas a 'furriner,' and equally sure that he had never been seen in those parts before.

"Ah!" had the fare said, as they drove into Hankerley, "this is Hankerley! This, sir, if I'm a true prophet, is the cradle of liberty to the down-trodden serfs of *your* country. From this spot the

trumpet has blown to call the slaves of toil to *re*-surrection. Yes, *sir!*"

The driver became painfully interested. He held an uncertain theory about his fare's sanity.

"Now," said the gentleman again, standing up six feet three in the gig, as they reached the middle of the sprawling street of shops, houses, and cottages constituting the village, and taking such a survey of the country as a peripatetic semaphore might have been expected to accomplish, "I must first see the little individooal who is the cause of all this muss. Then, just for cu-riosity, I want to lay my eyes once on that onhandsome skunk, Nicholas Jolly, if the Devil hasn't taken a fancy to import him into his do-minions to be his execu-tioner. And I guess I'm bound to see Samuel Stedman, the greatest man of the age, *sir*, next to John Bright of Birmingham and Henry Ward Beecher of Brooklyn. And I've chalked out, if God spares me twenty-four hours, to have intervoos with Mr. Byrton, the great landowner, and the Reverend Winwood Leicester, Master of Arts—(he was reading from his memoranda)—and give them the o-pinion of an American citizen on this crisis in the history of this decaying old state. Then I guess I'll travel."

As the American had vented these designs, his

great body and limbs moved about within his extravagant garments with mysterious excitement. The driver was more astonished than ever. They first went to see Hodge and the baby, whom the stranger embraced, and could with difficulty refrain from purloining. He said 'if he had him at Mount Napoleon he guessed he'd lengthen that young cricket's cords and strengthen his stakes to an all-fired extent.' The stranger's hat suffered severely in the low cottage, and his head did not come off scatheless. However, he succeeded in getting 'one first-class bump, which he reckoned he'd keep till he got home, to show American children how their brothers and sisters lived in Old England.' Leaving Hodge a bundle of books and tracts on temperance, prison discipline, and other schemes of philanthropy in America, and having failed to catch a glimpse of Jolly, here was the stranger at the Vicarage door, drawing his huge length out of the gig. He sent in a card. On it were printed these words:—

JEHOIACHIN SETTLE.

*Boys' and Girls' Translation Institute,
Mount Napoleon, Cayuga Co., N.Y.*

When, by the Vicar's directions, he was shown

into the parlour, the stranger's face broke into a grotesque smile as he saw Mr. Linkboy, whose clerical garments first attracted his eye.

"I pre-soome I'm addressing the Reverend Winwood Leicester, Master of Arts?"

Being referred to the right person, he said—

"Well, sir, excoose my blunder, which was a nateral one, seeing I didn't know one of you gentlemen from another, and neither of you from Adam. *Sir*, I've come to you on an errand of hu-manity! Shake hands."

Mr. Leicester with quiet gravity proffered his hand, and begged the visitor to be seated.

"I have brought no letter of introduction to *you*, sir, because in my o-pinion one human don't require introducing to another, and hadn't ought to. You'll see by my card, sir, that I'm engaged in the service of hu-manity. I board, lodge, feed, dress, educate, bind out, marry, settle, and save from drink, crime, *and* damnation, the souls and bodies of three thousand five hundred children in the State of New York annooley. If that aint an introduction to *you*, sir, I renounce hu-manity."

Mr. Leicester, entering into the humour of the situation, assured the stranger that it was a claim on his goodwill he could not reject.

"Sir, in the course of a tower to examine the

institooshuns of Eu-rope, I've got to be acquainted
threw your daily press with the case of Little
Hodge and his father down here in your parish of
Hankerley, of which I o-pine you are Lord
Rector?"

Mr. Linkboy and the Vicar could not refrain
from laughing, and then hastened to apologise.

"Well, *sir*, I tell you candidly I'm not versed in
your English Episcopal institooshuns, but I believe
I'm right in saying you're a pro-fessed minister of
the Lord in these parts, and I pre-soome take an
interest in the regeneration of the world?
Then, *sir*, I have constitooted myself a committee
of one for the American nation, to inform you of
the brotherly interest we take in the so-lution of
your great social problems, and to give you the
result of our experience as a new country. Sir,
you will excuse my remarking that since I came
into your country a fortnight since I've observed
among your people one universal delooshun. Your
people, sir, cling to ancient idees. You worship
the Past—I s'pose it's because you have a Past to
worship. We, sir, the American nation, having no
Past to worship, are forced to worship the Present
and the Future, and I guess we find, with all our
energy, and we con-ceit we're putty spry folk, we
have none to spare for anything else."

"I beg your pardon," said the Vicar, who feared that his guest would wander endlessly in the regions of the abstract, and anxious to bring him to the practical; "has this anything to do, sir, with the object of your visit? I am much engaged."

"Yes, *sir!*" exclaimed the visitor, starting up and navigating the room with extraordinary skill and vivacity. "It has to do, I reckon, with the question whether you're a going to let this grand old country go, as the great Carlyle once said of my country, over Niagary Falls, while you are worshipping, and coddling, and dry-nursing the old, wilted, bloodless, brainless, e-masculated relics of a con-dition of so-ciety God Almighty is bound to abolish for the benefit of mankind; or whether you will turn your faces to the Sun of the Future, with its grand, glorious, and e-ternal hopes of blessedness and deliverance."

The visitor delivered himself of this passage with a solemnity and emphasis that would have been effective in a great public meeting.

The Vicar was puzzled what to do with his visitor. He offered him a glass of wine.

"No, sirree! not for Je-hoiachin Settle, I guess, while he's living. Sir, that pison never passes my lips. I'm a Temperance lectoorer, and Grand

Master of the Jonadab Lodge of Cayuga Rechabites."

"Then I beg you will let me know," said Mr. Leicester, "how I can serve you?"

"*Serve* me, sir? *Serve* aint an American word, sir, since Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery. We neither give nor take service in my country. No, *sir*, I require nothing at your hands. I came to see, sir, if I could help *you*. I reckon you folks here-away are about facing THE PROBLEM of the age, though you on the spot mayn't be 'cute enough to see it. Yes, sirree! The miserable creeturs you call agricul-tooral labourers are beginning to wake up to the moosic of Freedom, and the situ-ation reminds me of an old hen I once had on my farm in Cayuga County. Sir, she'd done so much she was a long sight too ambitious. She lay one nest of twenty-four eggs, and then sot down and tried to hatch 'em. By spreading herself around putty wide, and sprawling her wings till every feather was doing double dooty, she'd con-trived to keep 'em all putty warm up to a few hours before the time when they had ought to have begun to peep. Well, sir, I was curis to see how she'd manage the lot. Sir, she'd moved them eggs around that smartly that they were all about of the same tem-pera-toor, but that warn't very high, I guess. Sir,

when the time had come and gone when her family was expected, she grew kinder serious, and I saw her with her head on one side considering the situation nearly twenty-four hours. When two days more passed, and no signs from the shells, she broke one on 'em to see what the matter was : and theer 'twas, plain enough. She'd jest had enough heat to bring the chick up to the point of moving, but true as you're there it couldn't open its mouth to save its life. I guess 'twas a case of slow development. She sacrificed that one to her curiosity, but it made her go on settin' another week, when she sot to in desperation and broke the shells of the whole lot, and turned 'em out in the sun : and though they looked a mean lot to begin, she kinder encouraged 'em on, and very soon they began to 'peep, peep' like all creation. Well, sir, that brood grew so strong and handsome that I sold every one of them at twenty-five cents a-piece; but the old mother, she'd had such an anxious time of it a settin' and a bringin' of 'em out, that it broke her con-stitooshun and she died. Sir, your nation has been a settin' for centoories on on-hatched eggs, and I reckon they'll remain on-hatched unless you break the shells yourselves and let the chickens out into daylight. I've been a visiting that poor Hodge, and I'm dubious he's the broken egg

that'll start the ex-periment ; but your Aristocracy and your Episcoopacy are not the sagacious old fowls I reckon if they don't learn a lesson and sot to and help your weak, ondeveloped chicks out of their shells into air and sunshine."

The Vicar and Curate were amused with their visitor's native style, though they did not appreciate the matter.

" May I ask," said Mr. Linkboy, to divert the conversation, " what the ' Boys' and Girls' Translation Institute ' is ? "

" Yes, *sir!* It's an institoot I established for picking boys and girls out of the gutters and sewers of New York City and translating them to Cayuga County, where we clean 'em and lick 'em into shape, and then, sir, we give them a second translation to a farmer's home in the Far West ; and I tell you many a childless mother out there is a blessing me this day for having provided her with a son or a daughter, all ready to hand, and free of the expense and trouble of having it for herself. Sir, by the blessing of God, that institooshun has saved hundreds of poor little souls from starvation and crime here and damnation hereafter. Praise the Lord ! "

The rugged features of the guest were overspread with a gentle halo as he uttered these words with

real emotion, and the clergymen looked upon him with kindlier interest.

“Now, sir,” he said, “I’ve been studying your problem of the agricul-tooral labourer this last three days, and I guess I’ve got hold of the end of the hank. From peroosing your press, sir, I opine that all your thinkers and o-rators are making one grand mistake—they’re looking for a single specific; and I guess they’ll succeed about as well as old Dr. Jayne of Philadelphia. He invented a ‘universal specific,’ but he hadn’t been selling it long before he was obliged to come out with a *partickler cure for worms*. Sir, you require half-a-dozen specifics. There’s your land question—well, I’m not going into it, but I mention it. There’s co-operation. Co-operation won’t save so-ciety, nor fill the bellies of all creation, no more than steam did ; but it’ll help along considerable, I guess. There’s the Trade-union. That won’t save your agri-cul-tooral population ; but it’s a lever, and if it’s worked by smart men it’ll pro-duce a sight of good. There’s emi-gration and migration. Those are in my line. Well, sir, I tell *you*, if we Yankees owned this British Empire, where the sun never sets, we’d develope that little estate in a way to astonish you natives! Sir, you’ll be surprised if I tell *you* the meanest idees we have of you Britishers in my

country is consarnin' your way of managing your magnificent Empire. Howsomever, sir, I'm conceited your people will live to try all these remedies and get them to work together; and my belief is, if you did you'd soon find your Poor-law Unions would require taking in, like onhandy clothes, and then I reckon you could utilise them for free education.

"I am afraid you are too sanguine, sir," said Mr. Leicester. "The Poor-law is ineradicable in this country. The remedies you suggest have all been tried in a measure, except the drastic one of Unionism, and what that will bring forth none of us can foresee."

"What it will bring forth? Well, sir, I can't reckon on anything certain in this enervated country; but I do calkilate that mountain won't bring forth a ridiculous muss, anyhow. It has grit in it, or Jeroosalem's a delooshun. It's about time your landed aristocracy got upheaved from onderneath. I guess no amount of ploughing and scratching on the surface 'll pro-juce any effect on *them*. Sir, I've studied this question, and I con-clude that this movement will transmogrify your English so-ciety. It will alter your agricultoor, it will change your land-laws, it will improve the con-ditions of your work-ing-class, it will in the end give a great stimulus to

emigration both of farmers and labourers ; it will disestablish your Church——”

“ I wish,” said Mr. Leicester, pricking up his ears at these revolutionary forebodings, and rising, “ I had time to discuss these questions with you ; but really, sir, I have not. I must pray you to excuse me.”

“ Sir,” said the American, kindly, “ give me your hand. I’ll vamoose. You’re an English gentleman, sir, and I take your hint. Now, sir, take mine. You, as a minister of the Lord, whose follower I am, though not in your track I reckon, consider what I’ve said : and mark my words, sir, before a year is gone you will be forced to look at these things from a new point of view, and then, sir, if Jehoiachin Settle is still ga-loping around this infatooated country, you may send for him to help you to solve your difficulties.”

With these words the stranger grasped the Vicar’s delicate fingers in his huge, chilling hand, passed through the same ceremony with Mr. Linkboy, and, piloting his long form with masterly ingenuity, reached the gig and drove away. The Curate had taken a fancy to the grotesque visitor, and afterwards meeting him again in the village spent several hours with him at the inn.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DARK DECEMBER.

By the time Hodge was able to go about, December had come. The dismal, long, cold nights and the storm-flurried hours of day ; the icy breath of the north-east wind ; the grey, gaunt skies ; the white frost on blade and bush ; the sleet, and snow, and chilly rain—all these ushered Want and Poverty directly into the dread presence of Winter. Scores and hundreds of labourers in the Coddleton district were now either without work, or were working on half-time. As Hodge recovered, Mr. Jolly, with a certain touch of English manliness, gave his victim what work he could ; but it was very little, and he rigidly paid him only for work done. The Labourers' Union, which had undertaken Hodge's expenses during his illness, were now too pressed by other claims to do any more for him. He had during his five or six weeks of high wages saved a few shillings—his only resource. The children's needs cried out sharply. The summer clothing supplied

by the Poorhouse scantily protected their shivering bodies from the cold. Mary's wit was nonplussed. On some days they had no fire except such as gathered sticks would make. On some days the only food eaten in the house was by Little Hodge. That diminutive youngster exacted Benjamin's mess, spite of his size. So the days—and the nights!—went on towards the Merry Christmas. Then was the time for a short glow of pleasure, when would come the gifts of coals, and blankets, and one or two hearty meals. The district was greatly excited. The farmers were resolute to use the opportunity to break up the Union, and they held out threats of eviction, dismissal and withdrawal of bounties, unless their labourers would abandon the combination and sign undertakings for a year's labour at a low rate of wages. The men grew fierce in the face of pressure and starvation. The Union could not cope with all the demands that were made upon it. Muttered curses began to give way to acts of retaliation. Threatening letters were sent. Ricks were burned. Poaching was incessant, and several serious conflicts with keepers aroused the indignation of both sides. The constabulary was increased and ever on the alert.

Thus, while the over-wealthy nation was rejoicing in the incredible prosperity of the closing year, and

everywhere old and young, in church and homestead, were preparing to celebrate the feast of peace and goodwill, the rich rejoicing with their wealth, the poor hopeful that some crumbs of Merry Christmas comfort would fall to them from the rich man's table, over the doomed district there gathered a dismal cloud, and on the hearts of its employers and labourers brooded the awful spirit of Cain. O Angel of Goodness and Mercy ! in pity of men's weakness, in remembrance of the Christ-mass time, from Thy Heavenly seat and with Thy shining wand canst Thou not—wilt Thou not—disperse these shades and omens of inhumanity, malignity and despair !

CHAPTER IX.

THE END CROWNS THE WORK.

MR. BYRTON'S state of mind was as hard to analyse as its experience was unenviable. He had, to begin with, thrown himself with all his energy on the side of selfishness, and in such a case conscience must always be soothed or vindicated with very strong stimulants. He had suffered, and was suffering, with poor Emily Byrton, the loss of an association he highly valued, and his mortification was the greater that Sir Henry Ewbank had taken deep offence at the Squire's treatment of his son. The defection of his friend the Vicar was another trial to his faith in himself. But in proportion to the untowardness of these incidents grew the stubbornness of Mr. Byrton's resistance to the Union. He credited that with all his mortifications. Consequently his bitterness increased as his position grew weaker, and as his conscience became less satisfied with what he was doing. Emily Byrton's sad face looked more and more

sad as the day of Christian hope drew nigh. This was a constant reproach to the Squire—one that tested his resolution and touched his heart most keenly; so keenly that by a curious perversion of his moral feelings he used it to stay his misgivings by the belief that he was a martyr. If one can only get himself to believe *that* he may justify a murder, at all events to his own mind.

Emily Byrton always looked forward to the Christmas week as a time of peculiar pleasure. Then it was that from all parts of her father's large estates came trooping up to Byrton Hall the men, women, and children of their cottier tenantry; and it had for years been her part to distribute, amid glad laughter, gay smiles, and cheery cries of 'Merry Christmas' in bass and treble voices, such gifts as the people could carry away. And there, always loudest and merriest of the throng, the Squire used to stand and enhance the pleasure of his gifts with kindly words. It had become so fixed a part of life she could not conceive that her father would intermit it; but when the week drew nigh, and she saw that the usual preparations were not made, the great bale of blankets from London did not come, and Nicholas the butcher had not received the generous order for a shop-full of joints, Emily looked in her father's face almost with fear. It

shone towards her, but she felt it terrible that his heart should have so changed.

“O Papa!” she said naïvely, “what *have* these poor people done to make you so dreadfully stern?”

The Squire's face grew pale, and it was only with a powerful effort that he restrained an outbreak of temper and turned away. But he could not shake the words from his heart.

CHRISTMAS-EVE had come: erst the night of nights of all the year, from the great Hall to the smallest cottage on the Squire's estate. Black clouds had gathered all the day, and came drifting with fearful rapidity in huge tangled heaps across the heavens. The wind shrieked dismally among the leafless branches, and those who faced it under that gloomy sky felt its desponding influence penetrate to their inmost souls. Everything was done within Byrton Hall to make the eve as gladsome as usual—the early dinner, the yule log in the hall, the evening games and dances; but there was a deadness throughout the festivity that no effort could galvanise. Emily, always the life of such a time, though she struggled to forget herself, was nerveless and distract; the Squire went absently about, waking up to episodes of fun in painful spasms;

Mrs. Byrton, watching with a woman's eyes and feeling with a woman's heart, wondered whereunto all this was coming. When the hour for bed arrived, the Squire yawned most gratefully ; and Emily, snatching a candle and forgetting her adieux, ran off to hide her head in the pillow and drench it with her tears.

Dour and desperate was the night. How the storm raved and the clouds drove ! How did the tyranny of Darkness oppress the scene, made more weird-like by breaks in the drifting masses that now and then opened and showed great jagged-edged tracts of dingy yellowish sky ! The poor waits shivered and trembled and sang out their quavering melodies in quaint discordance from behind any shelter they could find ; the fierce wind taking up the notes and carrying them, transformed into shrieks and yells, away into the infernal gloom. A night it was long remembered—when jovial guests returned home saddened by its terrors, and many a son of Want lay down and yielded his life to the demon of Despair. A night the Squire never forgot ; sleepless, anxious and sullen—when his own heart reflected the distracted ravings and gloomy spirits of the scene without. When at length he sank into a troubled sleep it was a pleasure to be wakened by the clear, merry voices of his children singing a

Christmas anthem on the staircase, while Emily made the organ peal out sweet notes of melody in honour of the baby Saviour.

Uneasy was the morning ; fitly following such a night. The wind veered round, and came sweeping along icy and hard. Dark, heavy clouds, massing themselves to the North-East, rolled up raggedly and wildly over the hemisphere ; and there was a keen, rushing eagerness in the cold draughts that blew out of the cheeks of those grim North-Eastern monsters of the air. Here and there, where through the night a few flakes of snow had fallen, they lay driven into ruts and nooks, where they seemed glad to nestle from the cruel breeze. How it soothed through the leafless branches of the great elm at the end of the Hall, and sang through the lofty old pines that stood on the knoll behind the stables, and rasped about the corners and the angled chimneys of the buildings, and spirited through every crevice, like a cold, harsh, angry Genius with a savage voice !

The Squire was specially uncomfortable. His breakfast showed that the air was no tonic to his appetite. He drew away from the table, and with his hands in his pockets stood looking out of the big bay-window over the dim landscape, across the lawn and the distant dark-ribbed plough-fields,

away beyond Truscott's cottages, as far as his eye could reach for the trees that studded the view, over property all his own, in a most cheerless mood for a great landed proprietor on a Christmas-day.

By-and-by, when they had all trooped off to church, the Squire went into his library, and drawing the arm-chair opposite the fire sat there with his feet on the fender. Wind and cold and deadness and dimness might tyrannise without, but could they reach the cosy man sitting in that cosy spot—there in the heat, there in the dancing, fantastic light which so saucily hissed and flickered away with its flaming tongues in scorn of the dull monsters outside? Yes; for the Squire looks nervously round to see where the draughts come from, and draws nearer the genial warmth. There he sits, moodily gazing into the bright, merry blaze. In at his ears, in spite of him, surges a torrent of thoughts he vainly strives to stem. Are those the cries of children? Unheard voices from unseen mouths, piercing through and sweeping away the obstacles his will feebly opposes to them, overmaster his soul. At length he becomes quite helpless and ceases to offer resistance.

"I wish I had gone to church," says he, getting up and looking out of the window. At the

moment his favourite retriever, Nelly, swept round from the back of the house, and after a turn on the lawn came up to the familiar casement, and seeing him there, put her forepaws on the sill, whining and yelping, half in joy and half in excitement.

“Why, lass,” said he, opening the window, through which she leaped in a moment, “what’s the matter with you? A merry Christmas, lass!”

Nelly licked his hand, but took no further notice of the salutation. She whined as she moved uneasily about the room.

“Hi, lass! Dost thee want a run then? Egad! a good idea. I’ll shake this fit off me in a blow up the hill.”

In less than a minute the Squire was out, crossing the lawn, the dog circling about him with signs of joy.

“Ha! lass, it was this you wanted, eh?”

To the left now, over the stile, up through that huge rising fallow-field, up to where glancing on the right he could see stretched out a large portion of his domain, and the village church, and Farmer Jolly’s house, and the farm-buildings, and the little row of cottages where the Union was born. He turned his back upon it. On again over the turnip-field, and now through the gate, whence a path leads to the right close by the keeper’s cot-

tage, while the broad track goes on straight through the woods. Nelly takes the path.

“What ! Steering for Robert Kane’s, lass ? What art thee up to ?”

The path is steep and the Squire puffs up hardly against the wind, but it seems not to sweep his dull thoughts away. Now he has reached Kane’s cottage, and the gamekeeper hearing the dog’s bark has come out and pulls a lock to the Squire at the door, and there is Bessie Kane curtseying within.

“A merry Christmas, sir !”

“What ?—Oh ! Kane, is it you ? Ah ! a merry Christmas to you !” And not noticing the smiling housewife he passes on, absently following the dog, who precedes him eight or ten yards. Over the short-clipped, clumpy grass where the hares love to feed, and in and out among the tufts of furze, and now traversing the copse, and so on into the wood went dog and man, treading the dingy, cold-crisped leaves, and listening to the miserable wailing of the wind through the naked branches. The old sportsman’s eye is never off his dog, and he sees her suddenly turn out of the path and dash into the underwood. There he hears her barking and sniffing.

“Quiet, Nelly, quiet ! Heer, lass !”



"WHAT IS IT?"

[To face p. 207.]

But Nelly barks more furiously than ever. Anon she runs towards her master and then goes whining back.

“Ay, ay, Nelly ! what is it ?”

—Ay ! Squire, drop your stick and clasp your hands in horror as you look down upon it !—*What is it ?* What are these strange drops upon the brown, ghastly leaves, and what is that upon its face stretched out stiff and stark under the nut-bush there ? Turn it over and shudder as the blood-stained steel drops from the dead fingers, and you see, above the terrible gash that hand and steel have made, the livid face of poor John Hodge. Lay hold of the blue fingers in your frenzy and rub for your life. Feel the chilled temples and lay your hand, knowing not what you do, over the still heart, and pull it away with a crimsoned palm. Cry out, Squire, in the anguish of your soul—

“Hodge ! Hodge !”

There is no answer from the lifeless lips. How the dog whines !

“Hollo ! Holl-o-o-o !”

On with the wind flies the strong, clear voice—down on the Christmas wind with a long, wailing, melancholy strain ; down to the cottage where Kane and his wife sat wondering what can have

come to the Squire ; down the cottage chimney to the quick ear of the keeper.

“ Theer’s maaster a callen, Bess, an’ purty loud too. Harkee ! agaen ! God save us, Bess ! what’s oop, girl ? ”

Here is the keeper running with all his might, his hat off and his gun snatched from the rack on the wall.

The dog rushes out to meet him.

“ Kane, Kane ! Look here ! ”

—Ay ! Kane, you too may well turn pale at the sight ! For last evening as you were ranging home from the Byrton Arms to your early Christmas supper, you met this man now lying gashed and dead before you furtively slinking across the open towards the wood, and like a menial as thou art, didst jibe him and threaten him with a beating for his trespass, in these words—

“ Be off, Jack Hodge ; be off, I tell ee, or I’ll gi’ee thee a racketen ! Thee’rt a shirken vagabon’ ! ” The last words John Hodge heard from his brother man.

The Squire has thrown his handkerchief over the face, and now essays, with the keeper’s help, to lift the body.

“ To your cottage, Kane.”

Kane sees that the Squire’s rubicund face is

marked in livid patches, and his lips are close together. The master makes an effort to take his part in the lift, but suddenly stops, and sitting down beside the body covers his face with his hands, and without affectation of concealment weeps as men seldom weep. The sturdy game-keeper, aghast and troubled, turns respectfully away, drawing the cuff of his new velveteen coat across his eyes to its irreparable damage. And Nelly, on her haunches, sits and cries too, the big tears coursing down her innocent nose. The cold wind keeps up its incessant requiem.

O Soul of John Hodge! canst thou, up there with the singing Angels, where resentment is unknown and revenge is forgotten, look down and see these repentant tears?

At length the Squire spoke—

“Better carry it straight to his cottage, Kane, I can’t help you. Go and get help: I will stay here.”

The gamekeeper sped with all his might, half afraid to leave his master by the body. But the Squire sat and gave rein to his thoughts. They were not very many minutes, yet they were golden minutes to the Squire; a bitter but a wholesome time. From them he stood up at length with a serener face, as he heard the crackling and leaping of fast-coming feet, and the horror-stricken men

broke in on the scene. Kane noticed that his master spoke in his old manner.

He walked on before the melancholy procession down over the head of the hill, the way the man must have come last night, and reached the cottage in advance of the bearers. In at John Hodge's door went the Squire without knocking. In at John Hodge's door swept with him the keen, rude wind, and rushed fiercely towards the empty chimney. In, too, came Nelly, sniffing suspiciously the doubtful air. Chill, dark, damp—everything precisely as Hodge had left it the night before: bare floor, and walls, and table, and the open cupboard, with some crumbs on the shelf, and no more: a small heap of dried leaves and sticks piled on the hearth, the last fatherly work of the dead. The Squire's heart sank within him. *Can he have murdered the children?* Up the narrow stair he dashed like a madman, and burst into the garret. Thank God! there is a cry or two; but 'a scene for a Christmas morning that might make even Parochus, who is a corporation and has no soul, sorry. Mary sits in the corner, her eyes shut, her face pallid, and in her nerveless arms Little Hodge, wrapped in the petticoat she has taken off in the hope of keeping the sparks of life in his tiny form. Tummas next her is asleep, and round the two

cluster, some sleeping, one or two awake, but seemingly incapable of motion, the brothers and sisters. They have been without food or fire these thirty hours. Nelly ran and licked the face of the sleeping girl. She did not move.

“Good God!” said the Squire, dancing about. “Here, I say, all of you, wake up! wake up! Merry Christmas, I say! Here, what’s your names? Mary, John, Thomas, Jane, Susan, Betsy!” —at the top of his voice.

Tummas woke up, with one or two others, who at the sight of the alarming stranger began to cry. Mary did not move.

“Bless my soul!” said the Squire, feeling her cheek. And away he goes down the stairs and out of the cottage, and there he is running across the old meadow to Farmer Jolly’s house, Nelly stopping to guard the children, and the sad bearers as they draw nigh silently thinking that he is deranged. In a few minutes he and the farmer and one or two women are back in the cottage with wine, food, milk, and a good bundle of wood; Mrs. Nollekens, aroused by the disturbance, coming in with Tim, and when she hears the news, her heart having smitten her for the fatal words she once uttered to the dead, she has gone off into vicious hysterics, shrieking and kicking on the floor with penitent

vigour. The body has been laid on the table, covered with poor Robert Kane's velveteen coat. He, in his shirt-sleeves, is kindling a fire.

“Here, Jolly, up here! Up here with the wine, quick, like a good girl! Look out there, Nollekens, stop that wife of yours! Can’t you sit on her head, and cut the traces, eh?” cries the horsey old gentleman, as he vanishes up the staircase. “Not a word about the father,” he whispers on the stairs. Then he and the farmer lay Mary on the bed, and gently give her a spoonful of wine, and so one by one the frozen little ones are roused from torpor and made strong enough to move about. The table, with its dread weight, is transferred for a short time into the shed in the yard; and while a messenger goes to the Hall for a waggonette the eleven little ones are warmed at the now cheery fire. Mrs. Nollekens, restored without the heroic remedy suggested by the Squire, and Mrs. Jolly, who has brought some clothes, wash the little hands and faces, and make the children all look as decent as may be, the Squire sitting by and looking on with a beaming face, all the livid spots gone from it and not a cloud to be seen in his clear blue eyes. And Nelly, stretching her neck towards the grateful fire, nods and winks a sagacious approbation.

Here is the waggonette ; and there among the warm rugs they bury the children, Little Hodge, whose rigid state gives some anxiety, actually borne in the Squire's own arms. And so they drive away, carrying off with them the temporary sunshine from that dismal home, and leaving the sad watchers by the awful dead.

— And who is this who has slipped round to the back, and having uncovered the face a moment and taken one glance, has turned away and is walking up and down the stony yard, wringing his great strong hands and repeating, 'God forgive me! God forgive me! I've made a mistake. God forgive me?' Ah! Farmer Jolly, thank God you see your blunder and are sorry for it! Are there not ministering spirits waiting to bear away to Heaven the sighs of a broken and repentant heart, and may they not come back laden with Christmas blessings even for thee?

Up the long avenue towards the Hall goes the heavily-laden waggonette, and see there on the steps and in through the open door what a glad crowd is waiting ! As the carriage draws up there is a great cheer, and that beautiful, golden-haired girl runs forward and takes into her arms the descending Squire, and with laughing and crying eyes says—

“Oh! you *dear* old father! Give me the baby!”

And so they are all lifted out, each one taken in charge by some willing convoy and piloted into—the kitchen? “No,” cries the Squire, “into the drawing-room.” And there is such a scurrying of housemaids, and consultation of nurses, and turning out of wardrobes, and general scouring and rehabilitation of Hodge’s children, that the day is far gone before anyone thinks of settling down to quiet or amusement.

Emily, having deposited her charge in the nurse’s hands, had gone to her father in the hall, and taking hold of each lappel of his coat, had looked straight into his eyes and said—

“Father—”

“Stop!” said he, kissing her; “I know what you’re going to say. Send Williams with the bay mare.”

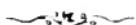
And Williams had sped for love of his young mistress all that long ten miles, and hot with speed and galloping there jumped down at the door young Henry Ewbank—jumped down into the open arms of Emily Byrton, who, not being at Ujiji, did not care a bit for the butler and the groom, and as she put her arms round his neck said—

“O Harry, thank God you’ve come back to me at last!”

“Hi! you two young people,” said a jolly voice from the top of the steps, “what are you doing there? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves.”

All the incidents of that merry evening I cannot attempt to tell. The dinners that were eaten, the friendships that were sworn between juvenile aristocrats and little snobs, the rioting in the dining-room, the peeping and hiding and shouting in the hall, the Squire’s animation and boisterous glee, the joy that beamed in Emily’s face, the self-satisfied humour of that young prig Ewbank, and the sweet contentment that played upon the gentle features of the mother, as she thanked God her husband and her children were themselves again: all this and more I might enumerate, but not describe. Mr. Leicester came over in the evening, having heard the news; and by-and-by, when the whole party were weary with pleasure, the clergyman drew them together and with faltering voice, as he thanked God for His goodness to them all, besought for them His mercy. And then they all went out to the organ in the hall, and Emily in rapt ecstasy played while they sang out with all their hearts in the noble strains of the Christmas Anthem—
PEACE ON EARTH: GOODWILL TOWARD MEN.

PART V.



UNIONS AND COMMUNIONS.

CHAPTER I.

YANKEE INTERVENTION.

THE Squire frankly owned the change which that Christmas-day had wrought in him. He had pushed repression to the utmost limit, and its fruit was an apple of Sodom. Mr. Leicester, whose mind had been greatly agitated by this fearful crisis of the contention with the labourers, went heartily with him. Mr. Linkboy was taken into counsel, and at his suggestion Sammy Stedman was sent for. To him Mr. Byrton declared his wish to make an effort to end the social war now raging in Coddleton, and candidly asked his aid.

“Sir,” said Stedman to him, solemnly, “would to God you had done this at first! Had masters met men with reason and kindness instead of passion and revenge, many heart-burnings and much suffering would have been prevented.”

“It is useless, my friend, to regret the past,” returned the other, quietly. “It is not too late to mend. Will you help us to do it?”

Forthwith the Squire, supported by Mr. Leicester and Mr. Jolly, who had taken two of Hodge's children into his house, set to work resolutely to undo all they had been doing for the past seven or eight months. How hard it is to fall back and repair in society the evils of so long and fierce a struggle! They admitted the difficulties in their way to be enormous, and the outlet not to be very clear to them, but they were earnest and they were hopeful.

After considering a variety of plans which had been suggested from different quarters, the Squire and Sammy Stedman agreed that the proper way to begin was to call a joint meeting of farmers and labourers to consider whether anything could be done to put their relations on a better footing. The response to the summons was hearty, both on account of the notorious facts that had led to it and of the impatience of both parties to end the existing state of things.

The Squire took the chair, and in a few touching sentences described the cause of the change that had come over his mind, and besought them from both sides to approach the subject with toleration and good feeling. Then Mr. Leicester spoke, and then Sammy Stedman spoke. The latter, not offensively, warned the farmers at the outset that

the Union was an established thing, and could not be dissolved: that its permanence must be the basis of any settlement. "A Union," he said, "is the labourers' only safe standing-ground. To some extent, also, it should be the farmers' assurance of a good footing. The Union cannot be given up; but you can, if you will, make it a different thing from what it will be if it must be your antagonist instead of your associate."

The Squire asked the farmers to concede this "I regard the Union, since I have looked fairly at its rules, and have had its objects explained to me by Stedman, with altered feelings. I can see how reasonable it is that the individual labourer should desire to have his position strengthened by association with his fellows—a feeling he holds in common with almost every trade or profession. The danger, of course, is that the labourers may use the power this combination gives them to tyrannise over the capitalists. But just as education and the teaching of experience have made other associations reasonable in the use of their combinations, so these labourers will learn that, if they exceed the rules of right, they cannot do it with impunity. In the long run their exactions will return upon themselves with disastrous effect. We are not without weapons to meet them, if it comes to that; but what occurs

to me is this—with a real desire on both sides to live on a good understanding, *need it ever come to that?* ”

The problem having been stated in this way and in this spirit, they all went to work to look for a solution. Hopeless work, you may say, Mr. Political Economist, but at all events more hopeful than fighting their way to no end. The meeting was held in the great room of the Byrton Arms at Coddleton. Behind the gentlemen who sat around the Squire, at the upper end of the room, was a door. Just as the meeting was about to buckle to the question, this door began slowly to open. Presently, at least a foot above the level at which the head of an ordinary human being might be looked for, there appeared a face—such a face as the assembled three hundred had never seen. A smile slowly radiated over its curious features, and a clear, though nasal voice said—

“I guess I don’t intrude, if I come in, eh?”

The apparition was altogether so unexpected and so rare, that the good-humoured burst of laughter which greeted Jehoiachin Settle, as he developed his entire length from behind the door, was excusable. He joined in it himself.

“I aint a Little Hodge,” he remarked aloud. “No, sirree! In *my* country we don’t have babies

born the size of dormice ; and I admit I've grown con-siderable since I first took air."

When they came to discuss the matter in hand, such questions as these were raised :—

1. Is the district overstocked with labour, and if so how is this to be remedied ?
2. How should men be paid—by time, by piece-work, in money, or partly with perquisites, cottages, allotments, etc. ?
3. How are you to meet the difference of capacity in labourers ? What is to become of the old, weakly, half-paupers, etc. ?
4. Can farmers afford higher wages ?
5. Is it necessary or expedient to give the labourers any share of profits ? If so, on what basis ?
6. Can co-operation be successfully introduced into agriculture, and how far will it act as a remedy ?
7. What means, artificial or otherwise, are to be used diminish over-supply, if existing ?
(Emigration, migration, etc.)

And so on. They evidently had more in hand than they could determine at one meeting.

The Squire, after a while, suggested that they were not then in a position to discuss these ques-

tions fairly. They had no sufficient data. They ought first to have particulars of the number of employers and labourers in the district ; the number for whom employment existed, either constant or casual ; numbers in receipt of out-door relief ; numbers incapable of work ; expenses of poor relief ; information as to modes of farming and amount of production, etc., etc. In fact, it was clear that before a new combination could essay to solve the problem at all they must first be in possession of the facts. Alas ! it had taken a long and sore journey to bring them to this obvious point ! They elected a committee to inquire into these matters, and to report thereon, with recommendations.

Before the meeting broke up Mr. Jechoiachin Settle begged leave to say a few words.

“ My friends,” he began, “ I’m a Yankee from New York, raised in Massachoosetts, and you may en-quire what business I have to interfere in your family squabbles. Well, the fact is, that having neither children nor quarrels of my own, I’m always interfering with other people’s ; and as a brother and a Christian I can’t help taking an interest in your troubles.” Then stating his view of the position, he went on :—

“ Gentlemen, I reckon this is the all-firedest

breeding-ground on the face of God Almighty's earth. Thar's no human diggings known to me where cattle and hosses and men and women can be raised to that pitch of perfection reached in your country. As far as I can o-pine, you're des-tined by the Almighty to be a substitoot for Abraham, whose loins were putty capacious, I guess, and covered the earth with a multitood no man could number. You Britishers appear to me to be doing the same with reasonable smartness. I calkilate your U-nited Kingdom will be chockfull in twenty-five years' time, and when that ac-me is reached I reckon I'd rayther not be around here. You'll have to thin out your stock, or you'll bust and go into bankruptcy as sure as you're a nation. Well, gentlemen, my particular hobby is the migration of children. In my country we've made it answer, and there aint no reason in life why you, with all your colonies scattered around the world, shouldn't make it answer too. You've not only got a surplus on hand—and a precious greedy, exacting surplus it is—but you've another surplus growing up, and you're going on breeding another surplus. Well, I start with the growing-up surplus and thin it out. Sir, first I'll con-tract to take all your orphans off your hands. Then I'll redooce your large families. You give me a child or two out of a family of ten

to thirteen people, and let me take them away, I guess I'll relieve that family considerable and benefit the children into the bargain. I'll take me those jooveniles and I'll carry them to one of your colonies, say Canady, and I'll find me there a couple of married folks that, for some reason or other, aint had the usual interest on their wedding paid down by the Almighty, and they'll take and keer for one of those children jest as if they'd had the trouble of having it themselves. Now, for instance, there's that blessed little creetur who's raised all this muss. He's about the capacity of a good-sized straddle-bug. I'll take that child, if you'll give him to me a few years from now, and I'll plant him in co-lonial soil, and on mush and hoe-cake and potato diet he'll swell and grow into something like a human." Jehoiachin concluded thus:—"Sir, I've done a good work in America, my institoot is flourishing, and now, for the love of God and my fellow-man, I'm willing to give some of my days to trying to do the same sort of work for Old England, if so be you'll let me."

Loud were the cheers among the honest country-folk at this promise of unarmed intervention on the part of Brother Jonathan. It was moved and carried by acclamation that he should be a member of the Committee.

CHAPTER II.

A VERY DRY CHAPTER.

THE way that Committee went to work, the earnestness they threw into it, the quantity of information they collected, the amount of talking and writing they did, was wonderful. And the report was more wonderful still. I thought at one time of putting it into an appendix, but the publisher thinks an appendix to a Christmas story is, like a tail on a human being, clearly *de trop*, and altogether monstrous and unusual ; so I put it in a chapter by itself, in order that those who prefer facts to theories may pass it over if they please.

It showed that the farming in the district was nothing like what it might be ; that the supply of labour was about one-third greater than the demand could fairly support ; that the surplus was to a great extent represented by the out-door relief ; that the wages hitherto paid were insufficient to maintain men and families in decency ; that the result of all these things was the depre-

ciated quality of labour ; that the farmers could afford to pay much higher wages to good labourers ; that not only was the excess in supply very great, but that, considering the number of families of children 'coming on,' it promised to be greater ; it reported that a certain number of the labourers were clearly not capable of earning a good day's wages, and never would be ; that there was a decided absence of thrift among three-fourths of the labourers ; that some of them ought to be placed permanently on the rates ; that the workhouse test should be rigidly enforced on all paupers, and outdoor relief be gradually stopped, in hope that the measures about to be taken would reduce to a very small number those who weighed upon the rates.

As to relations of employers and labourers, it affirmed that those relations ought to continue to carry with them the old-fashioned kindness and mutuality which had been claimed for the former system, but based on better grounds ; that the notion of pure dependence on the master's good-will should be abandoned, and the relation should rest on the more practical, rational, as well as more just, principle of contract ; that perquisites, beer, tailings, gleanings (which were a right common to all inhabitants, and one every year lessening in

value), should form no part of the system of pay, but that wages should be estimated at their fair market value in money.

As to labourers' cottages, the report was on the whole rather in favour of leaving these in the hands of the landlords, from whom they were to be rented ; the landlords in the district were recommended to agree on a uniform rent for their cottages, proportioned to the number of rooms, and a half-acre of land was to go with them, as a rule, when the tenant desired it. On the cow question the report advised no general action, but suggested that in the vicinity of commons, or where pasturage could be hired, association among the labourers in keeping a common dairy, and distributing the milk among themselves, would be more practical than an attempt to give each family the precarious benefit of a cow of its own. The report, moreover, suggested that by joint action among neighbouring landlords it might be possible to meet the difficulties of housing the labourers by laying out small villages of houses, with allotments near them, convenient to several estates : this, however, must be a matter of pure speculation or convenience.

The report reviewed the proposals for co-operative farming and industrial partnerships. It

spoke highly of both, and as poor Farmer Truscott was going through the Court, and his farm was vacant, it was suggested that an experiment in co-operation might be made upon it. Industrial partnerships were also recommended, when a fair agreement as to the standard of the labour-wage should be first arrived at, and the work be done on the condition that the labourer should risk the *profit* on his labour as the employer did on his capital.

The report significantly but vaguely said that the present conditions of the tenure of land were unsatisfactory.

The Committee examined the subjects of the distribution and proportion of wages. It adverted to the difficulty, in dealing with a great number of labourers, of ascertaining their proportionate value. Two methods of meeting this were mooted : one the adoption of a system of contracts, with gangs of labourers under some recognised leader, leaving the men to apportion the wages among themselves ; the other the adoption of piece-work wherever practicable : the latter was strongly recommended.

Lastly, as to the excessive supply of labourers, present and prospective, the Committee proposed that any association to be formed should keep itself advised of the state of the district, and

should form a sub-committee for migration and emigration; and they reported very favourably on Mr. Jehoiachin Settle's proposal that orphan children and others whose parents were willing should, with the co-operation of an institute which he intended to establish in Ottawa, be sent out to Canada to be placed out among farmers, shopkeepers, and others who would take them. A scheme for boarding out in the same way at home was also approved.

Such was the report made as the first result of an attempt to solve the differences between masters and men—a report unquestionably containing crudities, and suggestions that needed to be tested by experience; but which had this advantage, that it recognised the impossibility of finding any single specific, and rested its aims on a number of possible means of relief, and on a general combination to apply them. In this light the mere attempt thus to formulate remedies was of real importance. The hardest knots in many a social problem are often to be found less in the circumstances themselves than in the tone, temper, and wishes of those who profess to be engaged in their solution.

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE PILGRIMS.

YEARS have passed since that grave Christmastide. Ten years next Christmas will it be since John Hodge cut the tangled skein of his own sorrows and of his brethren's difficulties together. On a June morning, very early, there is unusual excitement at the Coddleton railway station. There is a group of little people of various heights and in different stages of joy or sorrow, who are the objects of painful excitement to a crowd of men, women, and children. Mr. Leicester stands with them, and now and then speaks a cheering word to some down-hearted parent or friend. There is Mr. Linkboy in his mushroom hat—not the one, I hope, of years agone—with a bag strapped round his shoulders as if for a journey. He has grown thinner, and there is a hectic flush upon his cheek. High above them all towers the form of that quaint but active citizen, Jehoiachin Settle. He takes out his watch, as he puts a large piece of spruce-gum between his teeth.





LITTLE HODGE LEAVES HOME.

[To face p. 233.]

“Children and good folks,” he says, “the cars are tele-grammed, and I calkilate you haven’t over two minutes to con-clude your hugging and crying. Then I guess we’ll get away for Canaan, and swop tears for smiles. Now look spry with your hy-draulics, for I guess it’s your last chance.”

So, amidst cheering and weeping and God-bless-you’s, Jehoiachin ‘fixes’ his party in ‘the cars,’ and the last he lifts in is a little fellow of diminutive proportions, who hangs about the neck of a comely young woman.

“Go-go-o-od-bye, Mary!” sobs the little man.

“Good-bye, Little Ben! God bless ee, my dear! Doan’t ee forget Meary, wull ee?”

“All in, I reckon?” shouts Mr. Settle. “Now then, young uns, strike up! ‘We’re bound for the land of Canaan.’”

And so, amidst cheers and wavings of hands and shakings of handkerchiefs, while Mr. Leicester stands with his hat off bowing a dignified but hearty adieu, the train moves away, while Jehoiachin Settle and his convoy sing with all their might:—

O Canaan, bright Canaan,
We’re bound for the land of Canaan;
O Canaan is a happy land,
We’re bound for the land of Canaan!

The Curate, as secretary, manager, and factotum of the Local Emigration Society, accompanies this, the fourth company that has gone from Coddleton, as far as Liverpool. There is a melancholy gladness in his face as he talks with Jehoiachin Settle about the future of these little ones. The American, looking into his eyes, knows that this will be the last company to be set upon its journey by Mr. Linkboy.

* * * * *

Here they all are on the Mersey, scrambling out of the little tender into one of the great Canadian steamships that is swinging in the tide, each one receiving a kiss and a blessing from Mr. Linkboy ; and then Jchoiachin looks under the mushroom hat, and, unable to restrain himself, folds the Curate up helplessly for a moment or two in his huge arms. Squeezing the white hand in his bony, brown paw, he says, with glistening eyes—

“ Brother ! On the other side of Jordan, brother ! Good-bye ! ”

—The lines are cast off, the great vessel shivers for a moment with a mighty convulsion, groans in her inner depths a mighty groan, and, with sound of rushing and splashing water, begins to glide away from her tiny companion. On the paddle-box below stands the Curate ; on the foredeck

above, striving to catch a glimpse of him, stand the children. They raise a shrill cheer. And see, Jehoiachin Settle has lifted Little Hodge upon his lofty shoulders, and the tiny hand is waving a handkerchief. The smaller steamer rapidly returns, the larger gradually grows indistinct down a long vista of sunlit water, but the Curate is dreaming a dream of a hopeful soul borne away from the terrors of its early days and the despondency of its native life to a land of hope and promise.

As he stepped from the boat, and passing over the pier took his way through the dingy resorts of trade, and anon past awful shades where vice and crime and wretchedness cowered from the light of day, he noted them not. There seemed to me to be a light about him. Methought he walked as one that walketh on silver clouds. And before his eyes a hand of some unseen one seemed to wave a shining scroll, whereon were these words:—FORASMUCH AS YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE LITTLE ONES, YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME.

CHAPTER IV.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

CHRISTMAS has come. Ten years to-day since Hodge's dead body did what living Hodge could never have done. The rime and hoar of time are settling down upon the heads, though not upon the hearts—thank God, they are green and fresh as ever!—of the Parson and the Squire. Christmas-day! The great building of Coddleton Union gives signs of animation and festivity. Here are squires' carriages and waggonettes discharging their freights of brisk-looking gentlemen, old and young; jovial farmers jumping out of their traps or swinging off their horses; and a crowd of men, all neatly dressed, amongst whom the gentlemen mingle familiarly, with a loud and oft-repeated ‘Merry Christmas.’

By-and-by, as a great bell rings out, they all press in at the Union door. Ay! rub your eyes, Master! Is this Coddleton Union? They are turning from the hall into the women's wing, where

poor Mary Hodge and many another like her had, in giving birth to new lives, paid the penalty of their own. But all that used to be here in her day is changed and gone. The room where Little Hodge was born does not exist. It has merged in a great hall—the hall of the ‘Coddleton Agricultural Society,’ of which squires, farmers, and labourers are indifferently members. The poor old Poor-law Union has fallen upon bad days. Five or six years ago they were obliged to reduce its accommodation one-half; and now the unfortunate Mr. Mee rules over its mutilated remains. Many who used to live upon the Union are now living by their own honest labour, and some of them are here, waiting with tremendous appetites for grace to be said over the substantial dinner laid down in the Coddleton Agricultural Hall.

Sydney Byrton, Esquire, is standing at the head of the centre table, and on his right is Sir Walter Waggington, Bart., M.P., his genial nose aglow with pleasure. But look there! They have been waiting for the chaplain; and now coming up the hall to take their places on the left of the chairman are the Vicar of Hankerley and the Coddleton Methodist Minister, Mr. Roger, arm-in-arm. And if you look round the room you will see other persons (their curates, no doubt, engaged in praying

away dutifully at afternoon service), and some 'Primitives,' and a Baptist, and a Bible-Christian or two; and altogether Peter's sheet seems to have been emptied into the great room at Coddleton.

Who would venture to describe the eating, or the talking, or the good-fellowship, toned down by the spirit of the day, at that wonderful banquet? Not I, I warrant you.

When dinner is over, and the Reverend Mr. Roger has returned thanks, devoutly but at length, 'the Report' is called for, and Sammy Stedman is the man who gets up to read it. It is too rosy. Were he not a teetotaller we should say he had written it amid visions of bright-hued wines and generous cheer. He reports the condition of the district 'most satisfactory.' Wages are good; they are now from fourteen to twenty shillings a-week, according to ability, nearly all by piece work. The arbitrators have not been appealed to once to settle a dispute. Sammy has been all round the district, and is happy to say that not a single landlord in possession has broken the compact entered into six years since to erect a certain number of decent cottages with corresponding allotments; the exceptions are in the case of some encumbered and charity estates; and the people are everywhere improving

in their care of them, though as yet the general result is not all Sammy could have wished. He hopes for better things when the next generation is educated. Nearly all the cottages in the district are now held of landlords, and only the immediate servants of each farm, who are employed by the year, are tenants from their masters. The building society has been very successful, and several men have become owners of ground and cottages. Sammy says "the good effects upon the men *is* very marked." The School Board is working 'most successfully,' and now has no difficulty in getting the children to school. Mr. Leicester and Mr. Roger are complimented for their efforts in this department. The co-operative farm at Charnley has this year been unusually fortunate. 'It is competing with some of the best farms in the neighbourhood. (*Hear, hear.*) They have purchased a couple of machines, and have been able this year to hire one of the steam ploughs belonging to this Association.' Sammy adds slyly that 'there is reason to believe the mode of cultivation adopted on the farm is being copied with advantage on other farms in the district.' Moreover it was beginning to be felt that the one hundred members of the Co-operative Farm Association formed an admirable reserve of labour for the farmers of the

neighbourhood, who found they could get some of the best hands in the country to work overtime after they had taken their shift of work on the farm. The report concerning the co-operative stores in the different villages was enough to make a tradesman dance with anything but gratification, so I forbear to repeat it. Lastly: 'Your Committee have as usual kept a keen eye upon the requirements of the district in the supply of labour, and as young men and women have come on, efforts are made to keep the supply proportioned to the needs of the locality. In this there has been active co-operation between your Society and the Agricultural Labourers' Union. The joint Migration and Emigration Committee have been promoting the removal of young persons to other parts of England and to the Colonies, and it has been found that by disseminating through the districts accurate and practical information about the Colonies, several families have been induced to save money, and with a little assistance from your Committee, to emigrate. The Children's Emigration Committee, under the personal supervision of Mr. Jehoiachin Settle—(*great cheering*)—and of Mr. Linkboy ('whose death in the midst of his usefulness, soon after his return from seeing off the last company, has caused the deepest grief and is an

irreparable loss to our Association'—a statement read and received with emotion), has this year sent out twenty-two orphans and others with the assistance of the Guardians of the Poor. *One of those sent out was the youngest child of John Hodge.* 'The kindred societies throughout England are in constant correspondence with your Committee on various questions of common concern, and steps are being taken to organise a more thoroughly National Union of the agricultural interests.'

This abstract sufficiently accounts for the loud and prolonged cheers which greeted Sammy as he sat down, after saying in his preachy way that 'they must all be thankful to a kind and merciful God for the measure of prosperity vouchsafed to them through the past year, and pray Him to continue to them the spirit of goodwill and brotherly helpfulness.'

Then the chairman stands up, the toast of 'The Queen' having been drunk, and proposes, 'Success to the Coddleton Agricultural Society,' the only other toast permitted, out of respect for the day. Drunk with uproarious honours.

"This day ten years ago, gentlemen," he said, "I underwent a painful but salutary conversion. It was followed by that of some of my friends

around me. It was a conversion from a policy of pride, prejudice, passion, and cold-hearted selfishness to kindness and humanity—to a sense of what my friend Stedman has called ‘brotherly helpfulness.’ We may or may not believe in the infallibility of the laws laid down by economical philosophers, but we must admit that even their operation may be greatly facilitated and improved by the intervention of that element—by the sense of a duty to be done not to ourselves only but to all about us, in every relation of life. Economy without charity, using that word in its widest sense, is as helpless as charity without economy. To-day we celebrate the results of our change of attitude. Employers and labourers were in fierce antagonism, and at one time it looked as if the battle must be fought out to the bitter end. But when we were made alive to the dreadful possibilities of such a struggle, and set to work to ward them off, earnestness and goodwill, tempered by practical sense, brought us to terms. We found our interests could be reconciled, and now I believe that they are one. It will please you to know, as an instance of the general benefit that has accrued from our altered relations, that the statistics of the coming year are expected to show a larger yield per acre from this district than from any part of England. Another

significant fact I ought to mention, the effect of the thrift which the hope of better things has encouraged among the men. The farm on my property which became vacant at Michaelmas by the death of Mr. Golding, has been taken of me at an enhanced rent by Richard Roe, formerly a ploughman, and late manager of the co-operative farm."

Sir Walter Waggington supported the toast in a characteristic speech, in the course of which he said : "Gentlemen, I once protested against the introduction of commercial principles into the relations of agricultural labour ; but I have found that after the first trial was over these have not only increased the value of my property, but have tended more than anything else, under sensible treatment, to bring about that community of good feeling and advantage which I was always aiming at, but knew not how to attain on behalf of my poorer countrymen."

Sammy Stedman then claimed the attention of the meeting for a few moments to a letter he had received a few days before from Canada. It was written, he said, by the little boy he had mentioned, the son of poor John Hodge, the first and last martyr of the agricultural revolution.

HOPE'S FARM, near OTTA WA,

Nov^r. 30th.

DEAR SIR,—

Tell Mr. Link Boy, after we left him in the big ship it went on day after day for a long time. I was very sick and throwed up. So did everybody else. When we got to Que-Bec Mister Settle took us all ashore, and we went to Montreecal. Then we came here to Otta-Wa. I am living with a gentleman and lady as came and got Mister Settle to let them have me. They are very good to me. I call them papa and mama. She kisses me every night and morning. I get ever so many nice things to eat, and good clothes to wear. I am growin a big boy. They didnt like me at first, 'cause I was so little. Now I'm growin they like me better.

I love mama very much. She has changed my name. I hope it does not matter. They call me Benjamin Hope. Hope is their name too. I want you to get this letter before Chris Mass day, when all the gentlemen have the big dinner. Please tell them I thank them so much for sending me here. Tell Mister Lester and Mister Link Boy I pray for them every night and morning. Mama likes me to, and says I am sure by and by to see them in heaven. I hope so. But I want you to get this letter, so as to stand up on Chris Mass day and tell the gentlemen

*from me I am so happy, and I wish them all
A MERRY CHRIS MASS AND A HAPPY NEW
YEAR.* [In large round hand.

*Yours affectionately,
LITTLE HODGE.*

*P.S. Mama says it's the last time I am to sign
that name.*

BENJAMIN HOPE.

And so, Reader, we who set out in Sorrow end in Hope. The blessed Christmas birth of sadness was the blessed Christmas seed, growth and fruition of joy for all mankind. The story of Christmas is ever the same story of life out of death, of light out of darkness, of love out of hate, of good out of evil, of hope from despair. So may you read it ever in your own experience ; and let the precious memories and sweet, sweet fragrance of the Christmas-time embalm your life for yourself not only, but also and always for your brother-man.

THE END.

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